

# IN SEARCH OF THE SUPREME

Volume II

By  
M. K. GANDHI

Compiled and edited by  
V. B. KHER




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## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

*Harijan*, 29-4-'33 p. 2

M. K. GANDHI



## EDITORIAL NOTE

There is a law or power higher than our will that regulates events. That power is eternal, all-pervading, at once immanent and transcendental. It is commonly called God. He cannot be experienced by the senses or the mind, for He is infinite. He cannot be described, for, He is indescribable. As Kathopanishad says :

नैव वाचा न मनसा ।

प्राप्तुं शक्यो न चक्षुषा ॥

अस्तीति ब्रुवतोऽन्यत्र ।

कथं तदुपलभ्यते ॥

कठोपनिषद्, ६.१२

[Not by speech, not by mind  
Not by sight can He be apprehended  
How can He be comprehended  
Otherwise than by one's saying 'He is!']

He defies definition. If we must, however, define Him, we may state thus : "The sum total of Karma is God. That which impels man to do the right is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. That which makes man the mere plaything of fate is God. He is the denial of the atheist." These definitions, it may be noted, are merely inclusive in their construction.

The concept of God is also expressed in terms of attributes like Truth, Love and Beauty — सत्यं शिवं सुंदरम् — by His devotees. Again, Vedantists define Him negatively as is done in the Upanishads. "Behind all the variety of definitions there would also be a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know."

The existence of God is denied by two classes of objectors. Charles Bradlaugh and others like him fall in the first category. Bradlaugh described himself as an atheist no doubt, but many a Christian declined to regard him as such. "Bradlaugh's denial of God was a denial of Him



as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. His was an eloquent and indignant protest against the then current theology and the terrible contrast between precept and practice.” The denial of God in this case is due to ignorance.

The second category comprises the so-called intellectuals who want proof of His existence. They are not prepared to accept the word of prophets and saints. Saints are generally agreed that it is possible to grasp the supernatural principle by enlarging and deepening human consciousness. That it is within the realm of experience to rise to such heights of consciousness is proved by the testimony of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in various countries and climes. The transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the presence of God is evidence of the realization of such a higher principle. Even in the field of physical sciences, many a phenomenon is taken on faith by the intellectuals. The theory of relativity propounded by Einstein is even today understood by not more than a handful of scientists. Yet the intellectuals do not deny its truth and validity. Reason and faith each has its respective sphere. Faith begins where reason ends. Such faith is not blind but enlightened.

Just as physical sciences have their techniques of investigation, so has mysticism. The basic techniques of both are similar but the difference lies in the fact that to test mystic experience from our present plane of consciousness appears *a priori* impossible. “We would be entitled to be radically sceptical if two things could not be proved—if, firstly, a change in the condition of our consciousness which is open to new possibilities of experience, were inconceivable in principle ; and secondly, if the means were not enumerated which would lead to this achievement. Neither supposition is true.” \* If the intellectual, without taking the trouble to verify for himself the truth of this statement chooses to reject it as a superstition, there is no help. The fact is that he does not want to follow the path leading to realization and won’t take the testimony of eye-

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\* *Indian Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, by Count Hermann Keyserling, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, p. 32.

witnesses. A belief in the existence of God is held by him to be unnecessary for the progress of humanity. "For such persons the weightiest argument in proof of the existence of God is of no avail. You cannot make a person who has stuffed his ears listen to, much less appreciate, the finest music. Even so can you not convince those about the existence of a living God who do not want the conviction."

God has been the object of search for the best of human minds since the dawn of civilization. These souls have not been the monopoly of any chosen people, but have belonged to the whole humanity. The paths they have trodden and the trails they have blazed, have been many and varied. Several of them have recorded their experiences in their own words while, experiences of others have been narrated by their disciples. Lives of these pioneers in the realm of spirit have been characterized by a high degree of divine qualities, described in detail in Canto XVI of the Bhagavadgita. Gandhiji belonged to this race of immortals.

There is an unmistakable trend in industrialized countries towards agnosticism, if not atheism. That the same process is at work in India is discernible to a man with vision. The erosion of faith is essentially due to the gap between the precept and practice of the high priests of religions. Their dogmatism, rigidity of outlook and inability to appreciate the needs, aspirations and problems of the modern man have also been responsible for their failure to interpret religion in language which he can understand.

Gandhiji has a message of hope for the modern man for, he too, belongs to the same age, and has a sympathetic understanding of his problems. He was undoubtedly the instrument of unknown powers, greater than himself, call them divine or revolutionary, as you please. Einstein said of him : "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."\* Gandhiji had deep, inexhaustible spiritual reserves. "He was obviously not of the

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\* *Gandhi, His Life and Work*, edited by D. G. Tendulkar and others, p. xi.



world's ordinary coinage; he was minted of a different and rare variety, and often the unknown stared through his eyes."\*

The path to God, as everyone knows, is fourfold: ज्ञानयोग (Yoga of Knowledge), भक्तियोग (Yoga of Devotion), कर्मयोग (Yoga of Action) and राजयोग (Yoga of Psychical Control). Gandhiji was a Karmayogi *par excellence*. His whole life was consecrated to the assertion of the supremacy of the moral law — the law of Truth and Love. He believed in the moral government of the universe and his conception of God was catholic enough to embrace the atheist, the *chandala* as well as the dumb and mute creation and even the vegetable kingdom.

Bhagavadgita was for Gandhiji a book of reference. He found it of great help and called it his *Kamadhenu*. It offers an excellent synthesis of the very best that is in Hindu spiritual thought and culture. Questions such as the nature of God, His relationship with the universe and the destiny of the individual soul have been expounded at length in the Lord's Song aptly called the Song Celestial. Discourses of Gandhiji on the Gita, therefore, find a place of honour in the present collection. To the earnest reader who seeks answers to questions such as, the purpose of human life, how to live and conduct oneself in this world, etc., guidance will be found in the pages of these three volumes. I therefore commend them to his attention and study. I feel sure that he will benefit thereby. "The harvest is plentiful but labourers are few." The harvest reaped will vary directly with the capacity and effort of each labourer.

I have dispensed with the usual foreword to the present collection, for, "no one who wants to start a worthy enterprise should ever wish to have anybody's blessings, not even of the highest in the land. A worthy enterprise carries its own blessing."†

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\* From the article "Spirit of India" by Jawaharlal Nehru in *Gandhi, His Life and Work* edited by D. G. Tendulkar & others.

† *Harijan*, 23-11-'47, p. 420.

I am deeply indebted to Shri Shankarlalbhai Banker in more than one way. To his happy inspiration I owe the title under which this collection is being published. He has evinced keen interest in the publication of this collection and has given me sustained guidance and support. In a true sense he has been to me a friend, philosopher and guide. I also wish to thank Shri Jivanjibhai Desai, Managing Trustee of the Navajivan Trust for his co-operation.

Bombay, July, 1961

V. B. Kher

## GLOSSARY

- Advaitam*—non-duality  
*Ahimsa*—non-violence; love  
*Alpatma*—little soul (antonym of *Mahatma*, i.e. great soul)  
*Ashirvad*—blessings  
*Avatar*—an incarnation of God. This word usually indicates the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the God of preservation and sustenance  
*Bhagavadgita*—(popularly known as Gita), a part of the great Hindu epic Mahabharata wherein Krishna is the divine hero  
*Bhagavat*—one of the sacred books of Hindus describing the career and exploits of the divine hero—Krishna  
*Bhajan*—hymn  
*Bhajan Mandali*—group organized to sing *bhajans*  
*Brahmachari*—one practising *brahmacharya*  
*Brahmacharya*—continence; celibacy; self-control; also the first stage of a high-caste Hindu's [usually referred to as (Dwija) in religious texts] religious life.  
*Brahman*—the Supreme Spirit; the Ultimate Reality  
*Brahmana*—the first or the highest of the four castes sanctioned by the Hindu religion (literally, one who knows Brahman); see Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shoodra  
*Daridranarayana*—the poor, the dispossessed in whom God dwells according to Gandhiji  
*Darshan*—sight; vision  
*Darshanwala*—one seeking *darshan* of his hero or idol  
*Dharma*—religion; duty. A comprehensive Sanskrit term embracing the concepts of law, justice, duty and virtue rolled into one  
*Dharmashala*—a free rest-house for travellers or pilgrims  
*Dhoti*—a long piece of cloth used as a lower garment by men in India  
*Foongi*—Buddhist monk  
*Ghee*—clarified butter



*Guna*—quality or attribute. There are three attributes predicated of all existing things, namely, *Sattva* (goodness; harmony; rhythm), *Rajas* (passion; motion; action), and *Tamas* (darkness; inertia; sloth)

*Guru*—preceptor; teacher

*Harijan*—literally, a man of God; an untouchable. A term first used for untouchables by Gandhiji. Also refers to the weekly *Harijan* founded by Gandhiji in February 1933

*Hartal*—temporary suspension of business or work as a mark of protest or mourning.

*Himsa*—violence; force

*Ishopanishad*—one of the principal Upanishads expounding Indian philosophy

*Jadugar*—magician

*Kanthi*—necklace

*Karma*—action; also popularly used in the sense of fate (accruing as a result of past actions)

*Khadi*—hand-spun, hand-woven cloth

*Kshatriya*—the second of four castes (the warrior's caste) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Vaishya and Shoodra

*Langoti*—used herein in the sense of a small piece of cloth worn by the poorest of the poor in India to cover their nakedness

*Lota*—brass or copper container (usually used for water)

*Madrasa*—school for Muslim pupils

*Mahabharata*—One of the great Hindu epics wherein Krishna is the divine hero

*Mahatma*—great soul

*Mantra*—Vedic verse. Also used in the sense of a secret formula having esoteric significance

*Moksha*—release from the cycle of re-birth; supreme bliss

*Muni*—sage

*Nirvana*—nothingness; release from the cycle of rebirth; supreme bliss

*Panchayat*—a village council of elected members of elders

*Panda*—a Hindu priest at centres of pilgrimage e.g. Benaras, Prayag etc.

*Raja Guru*—a teacher in the political life of a person; appellation used by Gandhiji in relation to the late Mr. G. K. Gokhale whom he acknowledged as his political *guru*

*Rajas*—see Guna

*Ramanama*—the sacred name of Rama

*Ramarajya*—kingdom of Rama which was known for its beneficent and just rule; now used to mean any just rule working for the good of the people

*Ramayana*—one of the great Hindu epics wherein Rama is the divine hero

*Sadhu*—person leading the life of an ascetic; an ascetic

*Samaveda*—one of the four Vedas, the sacred scriptures of Hindus

*Samskar*—essential and purificatory rites or ceremonies among Hindus like the naming of the child, first feeding of the child, thread-ceremony etc; conscious and unconscious domestic, social, cultural and religious influences which go to the making of a person; mental characteristics

*Sangh*—organization; brotherhood

*Sannyasa*—renunciation of worldly life; the last stage of a high-caste Hindu's religious life

*Sannyasi*—one who has taken *sannyasa*

*Saptapadi*—a ritual in a Hindu marriage in which the robes of the bride and the bridegroom are knotted as they take the seven steps round the sacrificial fire which symbolizes the eternal nature of marriage

*Satyagraha*—literally, insistence on truth; clinging to truth; truth-force; soul-force

*Shastra*—Hindu scriptures

*Sheshanaga*—a mythical snake with thousand hoods on the coils of which Krishna is said to repose

*Shoodra*—or *Shudra*—the last of the four castes (the caste of labourers) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya

*Shraddha*—ceremony to the manes performed by high-caste Hindus

*Swadeshi*—belonging to or made in one's own country

*Tamas*—see Guna

*Tapashcharya*—penance

*Tasbih*—a Muslim rosary

*Tilak*—caste mark worn on the forehead by a devout Hindu

*Tulsi*—a plant sacred to the Hindus

*Upanishads*—sacred Sanskrit books of the earliest religious philosophy

*Vaishnava*—a follower of the Hindu God Vishnu, the God of preservation and sustenance.

*Vaishya*—the third of the four castes (caste of traders and agriculturists) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kshatriya and Shoodra

*Varna*—caste; occupational division of Hindu Society; complexion

*Yajna*—religious sacrifice

*Yoga*—the science of control of the body and the mind; the science which teaches one how to unite, to join together the individual self and the Supreme Self

*Yogi*—one practising yoga



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ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किं च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
 तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्य स्विद् धनम् ॥  
 हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।  
 तत्त्वं पूषन् अपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥  
 ईशावास्योपनिषद् १, १५

[Behold the Universe in the glory of  
 God: and all that lives and  
 moves on earth.]

Leaving the transient, find joy in the  
 Eternal: set not your heart on  
 another's possession.

The Face of truth remains hidden  
 behind a circle of gold.

Unveil it, O God of light, that  
 I who love the true may see!]

Íśa Upanishad, verses 1 and 15  
 Translated by J. Mascaro



# IN SEARCH OF THE SUPREME

Volume II



## SECTION ONE : BASIC DISCIPLINES

### I VOWS

#### 1

### LIFE IS A PERPETUAL STRIVING

(A follower came to Gandhiji to seek his advice on whether a struggle to fulfil one's vow is necessary. The reply given by Gandhiji is reproduced below. It is taken from the article "Sparks from the Sacred Fire"—IX by M.D.)

Is not struggle the law in the natural world? If it is, much more so is it the law in the spiritual world. There is a spiritual law in the natural world and a natural law in the spiritual world. Life is a perpetual striving. There is always a tempest raging in us, and struggle against temptation is a perpetual duty. The Gita says this at not less than three places. I dare say there are many more places, but I remember only three. One needs must have the will and then, you know the English proverb, there's the way. And there are those Biblical sayings, "Ask and it shall be given", "Seek and you shall find", "Knock and it shall be open".

*Harijan*, 8-7-'33, p. 6 at p. 7

#### 2

### IMPORTANCE OF VOWS

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

In this series I have dealt cursorily with the importance of vows, but it is perhaps necessary to consider at some length their bearing on a godly life. There is a powerful school of thinkers, who concede the propriety of observing certain rules, but do not acknowledge the necessity of vows. They go even so far as to suggest, that vows are a sign of weakness, and may even be harmful. Again they argue, that if a rule is subsequently discovered to be inconvenient

#### 3

or sinful, to adhere to it after such discovery would be positively wrong. They say: It is a good thing to abstain from liquor, but what harm is there in taking it occasionally, say on medical grounds? A pledge of total abstinence would be a needless handicap; and as with liquor, so with other things.

A vow means unflinching determination, and helps us against temptations. Determination is worth nothing, if it bends before discomfort. The universal experience of humanity supports the view, that progress is impossible without inflexible determination. There cannot be a vow to commit a sin; in the case of a vow, first thought to be meritorious but later found to be sinful, there arises a clear necessity to give it up. But no one takes, or ought to take, vows about dubious matters. Vows can be taken only on points of universally recognized principles. The possibility of sin in such a case is more or less imaginary. A devotee of Truth cannot stop to consider if some one will not be injured by his telling the truth, for he believes that truth can never do harm. So also about total abstinence. The abstainer will either make an exception as regards medicine, or will be prepared to risk his life in fulfilment of his full vow. What does it matter, if we happen to lose our life through a pledge of total abstinence? There can be guarantee, that our lives will be prolonged by liquor, and even if life is thus prolonged for a moment, it may be ended the very next through some other agency. On the other hand, the example of a man, who gives up his life rather than his pledge, is likely to wean drunkards from liquor, and thus become a great power for good in the world. Only they can hope some time to see God, who have nobly determined to bear witness to the faith that is in them, even at the cost of life itself.

Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a bulwark of strength. A man who says that he will do something 'as far as possible' betrays either his pride or his weakness. I have noticed in my own case, as well as in the case of others, that the



limitation 'as far as possible' provides a fatal loophole. To do something 'as far as possible' is to succumb to the very first temptation. There is no sense in saying, that we will observe truth 'as far as possible'. Even as no businessman will look at a note in which a man promises to pay a certain amount on a certain date 'as far as possible', so will God refuse to accept a promissory note drawn by man, who will observe truth as far as possible.

God is the very image of the vow. God would cease to be God if He swerved from His own laws even by a hair's breadth. The sun is a great keeper of observances; hence the possibility of measuring time and publishing almanacs. All business depends upon men fulfilling their promises. Are such promises less necessary in character building or self-realization? We should therefore never doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir, (1957 Edn.), Chap. XIII*

### 3

## NECESSITY OF PROMISES OR VOWS

(From "All India Spinners' Association")

My own opinion and that of many others is that promises or vows are necessary for the strongest of us. A promise is like a right angle not nearly but exactly of 90°. The slightest deflection makes it useless for the grand purpose that the right angle serves. A voluntary promise is like a plumb line keeping a man straight and warning him when he is going wrong. Rules of general application do not serve the same purpose as an individual vow. We find therefore the system of declarations followed in all large and well-conducted institutions. The Viceroy has to take the oath of office. Members of Legislatures have to do likewise all the world over, and in my opinion rightly so. A soldier joining an army has to do likewise. Moreover a written undertaking reminds one of what

one has promised to do. Memory is a very frail thing. The written word stands for ever.

*Young India*, 1-10-'25, p. 336 at p. 337

## 4

## THE EFFICACY OF VOWS

(Translated from *Navajivan* by Pyarelal)

A correspondent who seems to be a regular and careful reader of *Navajivan* writes:

“ I spin regularly, but the question is whether or not I should bind myself to it by a vow. If I take a vow to spin regularly for one hour every day, I suppose I must do an hour's honest spinning unflinchingly, come what may. Suppose now, having taken the vow, I am required to go out on a long journey, how can I fulfil my vow about spinning? Or again, suppose I fall seriously ill, even then I must do my spinning, or else be guilty of breaking my vow before man and God. On the other hand if I do not take a vow, what guarantee is there that my resolution would not give way and betray me at a critical moment?

“ You will perhaps say that one's resolution ought to be made of sterner stuff. But when even the acknowledged leaders of the country are seen hourly breaking their resolutions, what can one expect from the rank and file? What are lesser mortals like myself to do? Would you kindly resolve my dilemma? ”

Being accustomed from very childhood to taking vows I confess I have a strong bias in favour of the practice. It has come to my rescue in many a crisis. I have seen it save others from many a pitfall. A life without vows is like a ship without anchor or like an edifice that is built on slip sand instead of a solid rock. A vow imparts stability, ballast and firmness to one's character. What reliance can be placed on a person who lacks these essential qualities? An agreement is nothing but a mutual interchange of vows; simultaneously one enters into a pledge when one gives one's word to another.

In old days, the word of mouth of illustrious persons was regarded as good as a bond. They concluded transactions involving millions by oral agreements. In fact our



entire social fabric rests on the sanctity of the pledged word. The world would go to pieces if there was not this element of stability, or finality in agreements arrived at. The Himalayas are immovably fixed for ever in their place. India would perish if the firmness of the Himalayas gave way. The sun, the moon and other heavenly bodies move with unerring regularity. Were it not so human affairs would come to a standstill. But we know that the sun has been rising regularly at its fixed time for countless ages in the past and will continue to do so in future. The cooling of the moon will continue always to wax and wane as it has done for ages past with a clock-work regularity. That is why we call the sun and the moon to be witness to our affairs. We base our calendar on their movements, we regulate our time by their rising and setting.

The same law, which regulates these heavenly bodies, applies equally to men. A person unbound by vows can never be absolutely relied upon. It is overweening pride to say, "This thing comes natural to me. Why should I bind myself permanently by vows? I can well take care of myself at the critical moment. Why should I take an absolute vow against wine? I never get drunk. Why should I forego the pleasure of an occasional cup for nothing?" A person who argues like this will never be weaned from his addiction.

To shirk taking of vows betrays indecision and want of resolution. One never can achieve anything lasting in this world by being irresolute. For instance, what faith can you place in a general or a soldier who lacks resolution and determination, who says, 'I shall keep guard as long as I can'? A householder, whose watchman says that he would keep watch as long as he can, can never sleep in security. No general ever won a victory by following the principle of 'being vigilant so long as he could'.

I have before me innumerable examples of spinners at will. Every one of them has come to grief sooner or later. On the other hand, sacramental spinning has transformed the entire life of those who have taken to it; mountains of yarn stored up by them tell the tale. A vow

is like a right angle. An insignificant right angle will make all the difference between ugliness and elegance, solidity and shakiness of a gigantic structure. Even so stability or instability, purity or otherwise of an entire career may depend upon the taking of a vow.

It goes without saying that moderation and sobriety are of the very essence of vow-taking. The taking of vows that are not feasible or that are beyond one's capacity would betray thoughtlessness and want of balance. Similarly a vow can be made conditional without losing any of its efficacy or virtue. For instance there would be nothing wrong about taking a vow to spin at least one hour every day and to turn out not less than 200 yards daily except when one is travelling or is sick. Such a vow would not only be quite in form but also easy of observance. The essence of a vow does not consist in the difficulty of its performance but in the determination behind it unflinchingly to stick to it in the teeth of difficulties.

Self-restraint is the very key-stone of the ethics of vow-taking. For instance, one cannot take a vow of self-indulgence, to eat, drink and be merry, in short to do as one pleases. This warning is necessary because I know of instances when an attempt was made to cover things of questionable import by means of vows. In the heyday of non-co-operation one even heard the objection raised, "How can I resign from Government service when I have made a covenant with it to serve it?" Or again, "How can I close my liquor shop since I have bound myself by contract to run it for five years?" Such questions might appear puzzling sometimes. But on closer thinking it will be seen that a vow can never be used to support or justify an immoral action. A vow must lead one upwards, never downwards towards perdition.

The correspondent has concluded by having a fling at the 'acknowledged leaders' of the country and cited their so-called fickleness to justify his position. This sort of reasoning only betrays weakness. One should try to emulate and imitate only the virtues of one's leaders, never their faults. Our national leaders do not claim to be paragons



of perfection. They occupy the position of eminence that they do in public life by virtue of certain qualities which they exhibit in their character. Let us ponder over those qualities and try to assimilate them, let us not even think of their shortcomings. No son can be called a worthy son of his father who only imbibes the shortcomings of his parents or pleads inability to keep clear of them. It is the virtues, not the faults of one's parents that constitute one's true legacy. A son who only adds to the debts of his parents would be written down as unworthy. A worthy son would liquidate their debts and increase the legacy left by them.

*Young India*, 22-8-'29, p. 278

## 5

### REPETITION OF VOWS

(From "Question Box")

*Q.*: All agree that mechanical repetition of prayers is worse than useless. It acts as an opiate on the soul. I often wonder why you encourage repetition morning and evening of the eleven great vows as a matter of routine. May not this have a dulling effect on the moral consciousness of our boys? Is there no better way of inculcating these vows?

*A.*: Repetitions when they are not mechanical produce marvellous results. Thus I do not regard the rosary as a superstition. It is an aid to the pacification of a wandering brain. Daily repetition of the vows falls under a different category. It is a daily reminder to the earnest seeker as he rises and retires that he is under the eleven vows which are to regulate his conduct. No doubt it will lose its effect if a person repeats the vows mechanically under the delusion that the mere repetition will bring him merit. You may ask, "Why repeat the vows at all? You know that you have taken them and are expected to observe them." There is force in the argument. But experience has shown that a deliberate repetition gives stimulus to the resolution. Vows are to the weak mind and soul what tonics are to a weak body. Just as a healthy body needs no tonics,

a strong mind may retain its health without the need of vows and the daily reminder thereof. An examination of the vows will, however, show that most of us are weak enough to need their assistance.

*Harijan*, 6-4-'40, p. 73 at p. 74

## II TRUTH

### 6

## TRUTH

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

I deal with Truth first of all, as the Satyagraha Ashram owes its very existence to the pursuit and the attempted practice of Truth.

The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means 'being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, such names of God as 'King of Kings' or 'The Almighty' are and will remain generally current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realized, that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God.

And where there is Truth, there also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word *Chit* or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (*Ananda*). There sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as *Sat-chit-ananda*, One who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other



rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fulness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading.

But how is one to realize this Truth, which may be likened to the philosopher's stone or the cow of plenty? By single-minded devotion (*abhyasa*) and indifference to all other interests in life (*vairagya*) — replies the Bhagavadgita. In spite, however, of such devotion, what may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every one following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves *tapas* — self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path, he stumbles and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true *bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the

talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal.

In this connection it would be well to ponder over the lives and examples of Harishchandra, Prahlad, Ramachandra, Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, the Christian saints, etc. How beautiful it would be, if all of us, young and old, men and women, devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing, till dissolution of the body makes us one with Truth? God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price; may He be so to every one of us.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. I

## 7

### HOW TO KNOW TRUTH

(Originally appeared under the title "Truth Is One")

A Polish professor writes:

"I am reading with intense joy your fascinating articles in *Young India* and wish to impress upon you the truth that they are the source of power not only for your own country but for the world. And as you have such a wide spiritual experience, may I ask you one question to be answered if possible in *Young India*? It is a very important fundamental question to which an answer from you would have great value. Do you admit that there is in human thought some absolute certainty, as for instance as to God and prayer, where we might be said to have reached perfect unchangeable Truth? Do you also confess that some particular experience led you to change your first opinion, for instance as to the right of killing certain dangerous animals? Now my fundamental question is, on what particular points do you change your opinion? And what guarantee can these changes leave as to the unshaken truth of what remains certain? How can we distinguish opportunistic change of opinion from the permanence of an absolute certainty in essentials? Can you define in what things we may change and what kind of things remain unchangeable?"



I have taken the liberty of altering a word here and there in this letter for the purpose of making the writer's meaning clearer than it appears to be to me in the original. Without in any shape or form endorsing the claim to the powers that the writer ascribes to me, I would in all humility endeavour to answer his questions. My own conscious claim is very simple and emphatic. I am a humble but very earnest seeker after Truth. And in my search, I take all fellow-seekers in uttermost confidence so that I may know my mistakes and correct them. I confess that I have often erred in my estimates and judgments. As for instance, whereas I thought from insufficient data that the people of Kheda were ready for civil disobedience, I suddenly discovered that I had committed a Himalayan miscalculation and saw that they could not offer civil disobedience inasmuch as they had not known what it was to tender willing obedience to laws which might be even considered irksome but not immoral. Immediately I made the discovery, I retraced my steps. A similar error of judgment was committed by me when I presented what has been described as the Bardoli ultimatum. I had then believed that the country, that is the people had been awakened and touched by the movement, had understood the utility of non-violence. I discovered my error within twenty-four hours of the delivery of the ultimatum and retraced my steps. And inasmuch as in every case I retraced my steps, no permanent harm was done. On the contrary, the fundamental truth of non-violence has been made infinitely more manifest than it ever has been, and the country has in no way been permanently injured.

But I am not aware of having changed my opinion about the necessity of killing certain dangerous animals in certain circumstances specifically mentioned in my articles. So far as I am aware of my own opinions, I have ever held the opinion expressed by me in those articles. That however does not mean that the opinion is unchangeable. I claim to have no infallible guidance or inspiration. So far as my experience goes, the claim to infallibility on the part of a human being would be untenable, seeing that that inspiration too can come only to one who is free from

the action of pairs of opposites, and it will be difficult to judge on a given occasion whether the claim to freedom from pairs of opposites is justified. The claim to infallibility would then always be a most dangerous claim to make. This however does not leave us without any guidance whatsoever. The sum-total of the experience of the sages of the world is available to us and would be for all time to come. Moreover there are not many fundamental truths, but there is only one fundamental truth which is Truth itself, otherwise known as non-violence. Finite human beings shall never know in its fulness Truth and Love which is in itself infinite. But we do know enough for our guidance. We shall err, and sometimes grievously, in our application. But man is a self-governing being, and self-government necessarily includes the power as much to commit errors as to set them right as often as they are made. I do not know whether this will satisfy my correspondent. But whether it does or not, I have no power in me to give him a more satisfactory answer. After all each one must be a law unto himself, the invariable condition being that he must then walk in the fear of God and therefore continually keep on purifying his heart. A man to be a man must be twice-born as Hindus would say, reborn as Christians would say.

*Young India*, 21-4-'27, p. 128

## THE GATEWAY TO TRUTH

(The following extract is culled out of the article "Some Questions".)

My love for non-violence is superior to every other thing mundane or supra-mundane. It is equalled only by my love for Truth which is to me synonymous with non-violence through which and which alone I can see and reach Truth. My scheme of life if it draws no distinction between different religionists in India it also draws none between different races. For me "man is man for a' that". I embark upon the campaign\* as much out of my love for the Englishman as for the Indian. By self-suffering I seek to convert him, never to destroy him.

*Young India*, 20-2-'30, p. 60

## SEARCH FOR TRUTH

### I

(The following letter was written to Shri Jamnalal Bajaj by Gandhiji in 1922 immediately after his arrest and while he was still an under-trial prisoner.)

Sabarmati Central Prison,  
17-3-1922

My Dear Jamnalal,

The more I search after Truth the more I feel it is all-inclusive. Truth is not covered by non-violence. But I often experience that non-violence is included in truth. What a pure heart feels at a particular time is truth; by remaining firm on that, undiluted Truth can be attained. This does not involve any conflict of duty or conscience either. But difficulties often arise in determining what non-violence is. The use of bacteria-destroying liquid is also violence. It is only by firm adherence to truth that one can live non-violently in a world which is full of violence.

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\*The Civil Disobedience Campaign launched by Gandhiji by violating the Salt Act.



I can, therefore, derive non-violence out of truth. Love is derived from truth; gentleness flows out of truth. A truthful Satyagrahi (passive resister) ought to be very humble. The more his truthfulness increases, the more humble he becomes. I have been experiencing this every moment. I was not conscious of truth a year ago to the same extent as I am now. Nor did I experience a sense of humility a year ago as much as I do now.

I am day by day realizing in an increasing measure the wonderful significance of the sentence: "God is Truth, the world is an illusion."

Therefore, let us always be patient. By remaining patient, we shall lose the hardness of our hearts. Absence of hardness would promote non-violence. We shall, then, feel our own mistakes to be as big as a mountain, and those of the world as small as a mole. The existence of the body is possible only by reason of the ego. The complete annihilation of the body is salvation (or self-realization). He who has completely destroyed the "ego" becomes an embodiment of truth. There is no harm in calling him even God. That is why the beautiful name of God is "the servant of servants".

Wife, son, friend, possessions — all these must be subordinated to truth. We can become Satyagrahis only if we are ever prepared to renounce all these completely in our search for truth. I am at present engaged in this activity and do not hesitate even to sacrifice persons like you because I wish to render the observance of this duty natural for every one. The exterior form of this duty is India's self-government; its true form is the self-rule of each individual. This is delayed at present because so far not a single true Satyagrahi of this type has been perfected. But there is no cause for nervousness. It should be the reason for greater efforts.

You have made yourself my fifth son. But I am striving to be worthy. It is not an ordinary responsibility for an adopter. May God help me, and may I be worthy for it from this day!

Bapu's Blessings



## II

(An extract from another letter written from jail by Gandhiji to Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj which appeared in an article titled "Jamnalalji" by M.D.)

*Moksha* is liberation from impure thought. Complete extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only one way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises, confront it with a pure one. This is possible only with God's grace, and God's grace comes through ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender. This communion may in the beginning be just a lip repetition of His name even disturbed by impure thoughts. But ultimately what is on the lips will possess the heart. And there is another thing to bear in mind. The mind may wander, but let not the senses wander with it. If the senses wander where the mind takes them, one is done for. But he who keeps control of the physical senses will some day be able to bring impure thoughts under control....Impure thoughts need not dismay you. We are monarchs of the domain of Effort. God is sole Monarch of the domain of Result....You know what to do to create a pure atmosphere about you. Spare diet, sight fixed on the earth below, and impatience with oneself to the extent of plucking the eye out if 'it offends thee'.

*Harijan*, 22-2-'42, p. 45 at p. 47

## THE ONLY REAL MISFORTUNE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal being a culling from the discourse of Gandhiji at a prayer meeting in Panchagani)

In the song that has been sung today, the devotee says: 'Keep my heart pure — guide me on the path of Truth. Give me true happiness which springs from holding on to Truth. Destroy the misery which results from relinquishing Truth.' Believe me when I tell you after 60 years of personal experience that the only real misfortune is to abandon the path of Truth. If you but realize this, your one prayer to God will always be to enable you to put up without flinching with any number of trials and hardships that may fall to your lot in the pursuit of Truth.

*Harijan*, 28-7-'46, p. 243

## NEVER DANGEROUS

When it is relevant, truth has to be uttered, however unpleasant it may be. Irrelevance is always untruth and should never be uttered.... Confession of one's guilt purifies and uplifts. Its suppression is degrading and should always be avoided.

*Harijan*, 21-12-'47, p. 473

## TRUTH BEARS REPETITION

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Truth has to be repeated a million times if it is not understood by all. If only a single expression of truth was sufficient every one should have been a believer in God by now. The fact is that the truth that God is one has a million times been told, but the hearts of only a few have been able to receive it.

*Young India*, 24-2-'27, p. 57 at p. 58

## HARSH V. PLEASANT TRUTH

(Originally appeared in "Notes")

With reference to my removal of certain passages from a correspondent's letter recently published, he thus complains:

"In spite of the expurgation you have thought fit to effect in my letter I may claim that in all my letters to you, especially where communal questions are involved, I have tried to observe not the 'prudent' maxim, सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियं (which means in brief 'speak not the unpleasant truth') although it be found in most of our received texts of Manu, but the saying of William Lloyd Garrison, the American slave-liberator, which has stood for many years at the head of the *Indian Social Reformer* of Bombay as its motto: 'I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice,' etc."

I do not mind harsh truth but I do object to spiced truth. Spicy language is as foreign to truth as hot chillies to a healthy stomach. The passages removed by me were not necessary to elucidate the meaning of the correspondent or give point to it. They were offensive without being useful or necessary. There seems to be the fashion to think that in order to be truthful one must use harsh language; whereas truth suffers when it is harshly put. It is like wanting to support strength. Truth being itself fully strong is insulted when an attempt is made to support it with harshness. I see no conflict between the Sanskrit text and Garrison's motto quoted by the correspondent. In my opinion the Sanskrit text means that one should speak the truth in gentle language. One had better not speak it, if one cannot do so in a gentle way; meaning thereby that there is not truth in a man who cannot control his tongue. In other words, truth without non-violence is not truth but untruth. Garrison's motto requires to be interpreted in terms of his own life. He was one of the gentlest of men of his time. Mark his language. He will be as harsh as truth, but since truth to be truth is never harsh but always



gentle and beneficial, the motto can only mean that Garrison would be as gentle as truth but no more. Both the texts have relation to the inner state of the speaker or writer, not to the effect that will be produced upon those to whom the speech or the writing is addressed. The *Indian Social Reformer* is rarely, if ever, harsh. It tries to be fair though often jumps to conclusions in a hurry and is obliged later to revise its estimate of men and things. In these days of surrounding bitterness one cannot be too cautious. After all who knows the absolute Truth? It is in ordinary affairs of life, only a relative term. What is truth to me is not necessarily truth to the rest of my companions. We are all like the blind men who on examining an elephant gave different descriptions of the same animal according to the touch they were able to have of him. And they were all, according to their own lights, in the right. But we know also that they were all in the wrong. Everyone of them fell far short of the Truth. One cannot be too insistent therefore upon the necessity of guarding oneself against bitterness. Bitterness blurs the vision and to that extent disables one from seeing even the limited truth that the physically blind men in the fable were able to do.

*Young India*, 17-9-'25, p. 317

## 14

## THE HYPOCRITE

## I

(From "Khaddar in Bihar" which appeared in "Notes")

If a man pretends to be what he is not, he is a hypocrite, not one who makes no such pretences. One who drinks secretly and makes his neighbour believe that he is a teetotalter is a hypocrite to be shunned. A man who makes no secret of his habit of drinking, but omits drinking in society, or out of regard for his friends, is not only not a hypocrite, but a sensible and considerate man, and there is every hope of his being weaned from his habit.

*Young India*, 3-9-'25, p. 301 at p. 302

## II

(From "The Purification Week")

There are two enemies against which we must guard — untruth and impurity. Purity of the mind is essential for the observance of all the vows. If the mind is not pure, no amount of physical restraint would avail. The Gita teaches us that the man who restrains the organs of action, whilst he allows the mind to run after the objects of the senses, is a hypocrite. We may fail to restrain the mind, but let us not be hypocrites. If we fail, let us own up, rather than be guilty of the double sin of untruth and want of restraint. For not only telling lies is untruth, but guilty silence or hiding one's state of mind from one's guardians is also untruth.

*Harijan*, 17-8-'34, p. 209 at p. 210

## 15

## MEANING OF UNTRUTHFUL

(Originally appeared in "Notes")

A Swarajist friend writing from Simla about the use of the adjectives 'violent' and 'untruthful' in my recent writings says, "You mean those who are 'untrue' to the triple boycott. May I suggest most respectfully to explain that observation, by the way, in one of your 'notes'? As it has pained some prominent friends here, so must it have pained others elsewhere. I have understood it in the light in which I have interpreted it above. But I believe, especially when you will be the last man in the world to be misunderstood; a reference in one of your notes will not be futile."

Had not the friend kindly drawn my attention to the misunderstanding, I should never have known its existence. The whole of my recent writings have been directed to the untruthful atmosphere that surrounds us. My criticism is all-inclusive. I know no-changers who do not enforce in their own persons the Khaddar resolution. Their action is in my opinion decidedly untruthful. When we do not

believe in the boycott of law-courts and still pretend as if we did, our attitude is untruthful. Many of us do not believe in non-violence in thought, word and deed and still profess to subscribe to the policy of non-violence. We are untruthful whether we are pro-changers or no-changers.

*Young India*, 19-6-'24, p. 201

## 16

## IS LYING EVER JUSTIFIABLE?

(From "Question Box")

*Q.*: What do you say to the following from Bertrand Russell? "I once in the course of a country walk saw a tired fox at the last stages of exhaustion still forcing himself to run. A few minutes afterwards I saw the hunt. They asked me if I had seen the fox, and I said I had. They asked me which way he had gone, and I lied to them. I do not think I should have been a better man if I had told the truth."

*A.*: Bertrand Russell is a great writer and philosopher. With all respect to him I must dissent from the view attributed to him. He made the initial mistake of admitting that he had seen the fox. He was not bound to answer the first question. He could even have refused to answer the second question unless he deliberately wanted to put the hunt off the track. I have always maintained that nobody is bound always to answer questions that may be put to him. Truth-telling admits of no exceptions.

*Harijan*, 9-6-'46, p. 170 at p. 171



## PROPAGATION OF TRUTH

(From the summary by M.D. of Gandhiji's address to the fifth session of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Brindāban in Champaran, Bihar, which appeared under the heading "The New Technique".)

I come now to what is called the "Gandhian" ideology and the means of propagating it. The propagation of truth and non-violence can be done less by books than by actually living those principles. Life truly lived is more than books. I do not say that we may not issue books and newspapers. I only say that they are not indispensable. If we are true devotees of truth and Ahimsa, God will endow us with the requisite intellect to solve problems. That devotion presupposes the will to understand our opponent's view-point. We must make a sincere effort to enter into his mind and to understand his view-point. That is what is meant by non-violence walking straight into the mouth of violence. If we are armed with that attitude of mind, we may hope to propagate Ahimsa principles. Without that, book and newspaper propaganda is of no avail. You do not know with what indifference I used to run *Young India*. I did not shed a single tear when *Young India* had to be stopped. But Satyagraha, which it was intended to help, survived it. For Satyagraha does not depend on outside help, it derives all its strength from within.

*Harijan*, 13-5-'39, p. 121 at p. 122

## THE WAY TRUTH WORKS

(From "Notes")

'A well-wisher' sends these lines for my meditation:

"The Bible can be read in 566 languages. In how many can the Upanishads and the Gita?

"How many leper asylums and institutions for the depressed and the distressed have the missionaries? How many have you?"

It is usual for me to receive such posers. 'A well-wisher' deserves an answer. I have great regard for the missionaries for their zeal and self-sacrifice. But I have not hesitated to point out to them that both are often misplaced. What though the Bible were translated in every tongue in the world? Is a patent medicine better than the Upanishads for being advertised in more languages than the Upanishads? An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it. The Bible was a greater power when the early fathers preached it than it is today. 'A well-wisher' has little conception of the way truth works, if he thinks that the translation of the Bible in more languages than the Upanishads is any test of its superiority. Truth has to be lived if it is to fructify. But if it is any satisfaction to 'A well-wisher' to have my answer I may gladly tell him that the Upanishads and the Gita have been translated into fewer languages than the Bible. I have never been anxious enough to know in how many languages they are translated.

As for the second question, too, I must own that the missionaries have founded many leper asylums and the like. I have founded none. But I stand unmoved. I am not competing with the missionaries or anybody else in such matters. I am trying humbly to serve humanity as God leads me. The founding of leper asylums etc. is only one of the ways, and perhaps not the best, of serving humanity. But even such noble service loses much of its nobility when conversion is the motive behind it. That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake.

But let me not be misunderstood. The missionaries that selflessly work away in such asylums command my respect. I am ashamed to have to confess that Hindus have become so callous as to care little for the waifs and strays of India, let alone the world.

*Young India*, 26-2-'25, p. 74

### III AHIMSA

19

#### AHIMSA OR LOVE

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

We saw last week how the path of Truth is as narrow as it is straight. Even so is that of Ahimsa. It is like balancing oneself on the edge of a sword. By concentration an acrobat can walk on a rope. But the concentration required to tread the path of Truth and Ahimsa is far greater. The slightest inattention brings one tumbling to the ground. One can realize Truth and Ahimsa only by ceaseless striving.

But it is impossible for us to realize perfect Truth so long as we are imprisoned in this mortal frame. We can only visualize it in our imagination. We cannot, through the instrumentality of this ephemeral body, see face to face Truth which is eternal. That is why in the last resort one must depend on faith.

It appears that the impossibility of full realization of Truth in this mortal body led some ancient seeker after Truth to the appreciation of Ahimsa. The question which confronted him was: "Shall I bear with those who create difficulties for me, or shall I destroy them?" The seeker realized that he who went on destroying others did not make headway but simply stayed where he was, while the man who suffered those who created difficulties marched ahead, and at times even took the others with him. The first act of destruction taught him that the Truth which was the object of his quest was not outside himself but within. Hence the more he took to violence, the more he



receded from Truth. For in fighting the imagined enemy without, he neglected the enemy within.

We punish thieves, because we think they harass us. They may leave us alone; but they will only transfer their attentions to another victim. This other victim however is also a human being, ourselves in a different form, and so we are caught in a vicious circle. The trouble from thieves continues to increase, as they think it is their business to steal. In the end we see that it is better to endure the thieves than to punish them. The forbearance may even bring them to their senses. By enduring them we realize that thieves are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished. But whilst we may bear with the thieves, we may not endure the infliction. That would only induce cowardice. So we realize a further duty. Since we regard the thieves as our kith and kin, they must be made to realize the kinship. And so we must take pains to devise ways and means of winning them over. This is the path of Ahimsa. It may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Given these two conditions, the thief is bound in the end to turn away from his evil ways. Thus step by step we learn how to make friends with all the world; we realize the greatness of God — of Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering; we become braver and more enterprising; we understand more clearly the difference between what is everlasting and what is not; we learn how to distinguish between what is our duty and what is not. Our pride melts away, and we become humble. Our worldly attachments diminish, and the evil within us diminishes from day to day.

Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of Ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of Ahimsa is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our presence there.

What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachment to it. This freedom from all attachment is the realization of God as Truth. Such realization cannot be attained in a hurry. The body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over to our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without Ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined, that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so Ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir, (1957 Edn.), Chap. II*



## OBSERVANCE OF AHIMSA IN THE ASHRAM

The greatest difficulties perhaps were encountered as regards the observance of Ahimsa. There are problems of Truth, but it is not very hard to understand what Truth is. But in understanding Ahimsa we every now and then find ourselves out of our depth. Ahimsa was discussed in the Ashram at greater length than any other subject. Even now the question often arises whether a particular act is violent or non-violent. And even if we know the distinction between violence and non-violence, we are often unable to satisfy the demand of non-violence on account of weakness which cannot easily be overcome.

Ahimsa means not to hurt any living creature by thought, word or deed, even for the supposed benefit of that creature. To observe this principle fully is impossible for men, who kill a number of living beings large and small as they breathe or blink or till the land. We catch and hurt snakes or scorpions for fear of being bitten and leave them in some out-of-the-way place if we do not kill them. Hurting them in this way may be unavoidable, but is clearly Himsa as defined above.

If I save the food I eat or the clothes I wear or the space I occupy, it is obvious that these can be utilized by some one else whose need is greater than mine. As my selfishness prevents him from using these things, my physical enjoyment involves violence to my poorer neighbour. When I eat cereals and vegetables in order to support life, that means violence done to vegetable life.

Surrounded thus as I am by violence on all sides, how am I to observe non-violence? Fresh difficulties are bound to arise at every step as I try to do so.

The violence described above is easily recognized as such. But what about our being angry with one another? A teacher inflicting corporal punishment on his pupils, a mother taking her children to task, a man losing his temper in his intercourse with equals, all these are guilty of violence,



and violence of a bad type, which is not easy to tackle. Violence is there where there is attachment on the one hand and dislike on the other. How are we to get rid of it?

The first lesson therefore that we in the Ashram must learn is that although to sever some person's head from his body for the sake of the country or the family or oneself is indeed a violent act, the subtle violence involved in injuring the feelings of other people day in and day out is possibly very much worse than that. Murders committed in the world will seem to be numerous when considered by themselves and not so numerous when compared with the number of deaths due to other causes; but the subtle violence involved in daily loss of temper and the like defies all attempts at calculation.

We are constantly striving in the Ashram to deal with all these kinds of violence. All of us realize our own weakness. All of us including myself are afraid of snakes for instance. We therefore as a rule catch them and put them out of harm's way. But if some one kills a snake out of fear, he is not taken to task. There was once a snake in the cowshed, and it was impossible to catch it where it was. It was a risky thing to keep the cattle there; the men also were afraid of working thereabouts. Maganlal Gandhi felt helpless and permitted them to kill that snake. I approved of his action when he told me about it. I believe that even if I had been there on the spot, I could not have done anything other than what he did. My intellect tells me that I must treat even a snake as my kinsman and at the risk of losing my life I must hold the snake in my hands and take it away from those who are afraid of it. But in my heart I do not harbour the necessary love, fearlessness and readiness to die of snake-bite. I am trying to cultivate all these qualities but have not still succeeded in the attempt. It is possible that if I am attacked by a snake, I may neither resist nor kill it. But I am not willing to place any one else's life in danger.

Once in the Ashram the monkeys made a terrible nuisance of themselves and did extensive damage to the crops. The watchman tried to frighten them by making a show of hurling stones from a sling but in vain. He then

actually threw stones and injured and crippled one of the monkeys. I thought this even worse than killing it. I therefore held discussions with co-workers in the Ashram, and finally we took the decision that if we could not get rid of the monkeys by gentle means short of wounding them, we must kill one or two of them and end the nuisance. Before this decision was taken there was a public discussion in the columns of *Navajivan* which may be consulted by the curious.

No one outside India thinks that one should not kill even a violent animal. Some individuals like St. Francis observed this rule, but the common people did not, so far as I am aware. The Ashram believes in the principle, but it is a pity that we have not succeeded in putting it into practice. We have not still acquired the art of doing this. It is possible that many men will have to lay down their lives before this art is mastered. For the present it is only a consummation devoutly to be wished for. The principle has long been accepted in India but the practice is very imperfect on account of our laziness and self-deception.

Mad dogs are killed in the Ashram, the idea being that they die after much suffering and never recover. Our people torture mad dogs instead of killing them and deceive themselves into thinking that they observe non-violence. As a matter of fact they only indulge in greater violence.

Non-violence sometimes calls upon us to put an end to the life of a living being. For instance a calf in the Ashram dairy was lame and had developed terrible sores; it could not eat and breathed with difficulty. After three days' argument with myself and my co-workers I had poison injected into its body and thus put an end to its life. That action was non-violent, because it was wholly unselfish inasmuch as the sole purpose was to achieve the calf's relief from pain. It was a surgical operation, and I should do exactly the same thing with my child, if he were in the same predicament.

Many Hindus were shocked at this, but their reaction to the incident only betrays their ignorance of the nature of Ahimsa, which has for us long ceased to be a living



faith, and has been degraded into formalities complied with when not very inconvenient.

Here we must take leave of the Ashram experiments with Ahimsa as regards sub-human species.

Ahimsa as regards sub-human life is from the Ashram point of view an important aspect but still only one aspect of this comprehensive principle. Our dealings with our fellow-men are still more important than that. The commonest form of human intercourse is either violent or non-violent. Fortunately for humanity non-violence pervades human life and is observed by men without special effort. If we had not borne with one another, mankind would have been destroyed long ago. Ahimsa would thus appear to be the law of life, but we are not thus far entitled, to any credit for observing it.

Whenever there is a clash of ephemeral interests, men tend to resort to violence. But with a deliberate observance of non-violence a person experiences a second birth or 'conversion'. We in the Ashram are out to observe Ahimsa intelligently. In so doing we meet with numerous obstacles, disappointments and trials of faith. We may not be satisfied with observing Ahimsa in deed only. Not to think badly of any one, not to wish ill to him though we have suffered at his hands, not to hurt him even in thought, — this is an uphill task, but therein lies the acid test of our Ahimsa.

Thieves have visited the Ashram from outside, and there have been thieves in the Ashram itself. But we do not believe in inflicting punishment on them. We do not inform the police; we put up with the losses as best we may. This rule has been infringed at times. A thief was once caught red-handed by day. The Ashramite who caught him bound him with a rope and treated him contemptuously. I was in the Ashram at the time. I went to the thief, rebuked him and set him free. But as a matter of fact Ahimsa demands from us something more than this. We must find out and apply methods which would put a stop to thieving altogether. For one thing we must diminish the number of our 'possessions' so as not to tempt others. Secondly we must bring about a reformation in the surrounding villages. And



thirdly the Ashram ministry should be extended in scope so that the bad as well as the good would learn to look upon the settlement as their own.

We thus find that it is impossible for a man with 'possessions' to observe Ahimsa even in the gross meaning of that term. A man of property must adopt measures for its security involving the punishment of whoever tries to steal it. Only he can observe Ahimsa who holds nothing as his own and works away in a spirit of total detachment. If there are many such individuals and organizations in society, violence will not be much in evidence. As gunpowder has a large place in a society based on violence and a soldier who can handle it with skill becomes entitled to honour and rewards, even so in a non-violent society self-suffering and self-control are its 'munitions of war', and persons endowed with these qualities are its natural protectors. The world at large has not still accepted Ahimsa in this sense. India has accepted it more or less but not in a comprehensive manner. The Ashram holds that Ahimsa should be universal in scope, and that society can be built up on the foundations of Ahimsa. It conducts experiments with this end in view, but these have not been very successful. I have been unable to cite in this chapter much that would hearten the votary of Ahimsa. This does not apply of course to Ahimsa as applied to politics, to which I propose to devote a separate\* chapter.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*Ashram Observances in Action*, (1959 Edn.), Chap. III

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\* This Chapter was never written. — V. G. D.

## BONDAGE OF LOVE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Commenting on the *bhajan* of the evening, "*Sabase unchi prem sagai*", Gandhiji said that in that song the poet had sung of the bondage of love or Ahimsa. There was no bond higher or stronger than that of love. Under the power of Sudama's love Lord Krishna had accepted the former's gift of broken rice taken out of a dirty rag and had preferred to partake of the simple greens and herbs of Vidura in preference to Duryodhana's rare and luscious fruit. Again, it was in return for Arjuna's loving devotion that he had forgotten his royalty and became Arjuna's charioteer and we are told that it was the mastery of his art that contributed more to Arjuna's victory than the might of the latter's bow. Service of love was the highest service one could render to another. It asked for no consideration or return. "Love becomes a sordid bargain when it asks for return or compensation; it degrades. Spontaneous service of love purifies and elevates.

*Harijan*, 2-6-'46, p. 166 at p. 167

## POTENCY OF AHIMSA OR LOVE

(The following extract is taken from the article "Never Faileth".)

The seer who knew what he gave to the world has said, 'Hate dissolves in the presence of Ahimsa.' The true rendering of the word in English is love or charity. And does not the Bible say:

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour,  
 "Believeth all things,  
 "Hopeth all things,  
 "Never faileth."

*Young India*, 20-2-'30, p. 60

## AHIMSA NEVER FAILS

The following correspondence between a European friend and Gandhiji is published for general information.

The European friend writes:

“After carefully studying Roy Walker’s thrilling story of your admirable work (*Sword of Gold*) I was satisfied that, lifelong as your struggle for non-violence had been, your unlimited devotion had met with success, at least as far as India’s leaders and masses were concerned, and the fact that Britain retired from India in apparent goodwill and friendship, seemed to bear out the hope that appreciation of non-violence was no longer restricted to your own country. The first breach into the thick walls of violence seemed made, and the prospects for humanity seemed to have grown more lucid than ever.

“All the more depressing were your recent confessions, as reported by the last edition of *Peace News* by George Ll. Davies. It grieves me to the heart to read that you had never experienced the dark despair that was today within you. And though it is certainly true that God does not demand success but truth and love from a man, it is a sad sight to behold mankind as deeply entangled by violence as not to yield to the vast extent of soul-force and self-sacrifice given by you and your few friends during a life time.

“However, willingly admitting as I do that you are in a far better position to look into the heart of things than I am, I cannot believe that your heroic efforts should be lost upon mankind, that the good seed you have so untiringly sown in all your surroundings, by words as well as by your example, should be wasted.

“Be that as it may, I for one (and I am sure I speak the heart of untold millions) feel it my bounden duty to express my deepest gratitude to you for giving the whole of your life to what you felt to be the one way to salvation for mankind.”

Gandhiji’s reply runs thus:

“I have not seen the report you refer to. In any case, whatever I have said does not refer in any way to the failure of Ahimsa, but it refers to my failure to recognize, until it was too late, that what I had mistaken for Ahimsa



was not Ahimsa, but passive resistance of the weak, which can never be called Ahimsa even in the remotest sense. The internecine feud that is going on today in India is the direct outcome of the energy that was set free during the thirty years' action of the weak. Hence, the proper way to view the present outburst of violence throughout the world is to recognize that the technique of unconquerable non-violence of the strong has not been at all fully discovered as yet. Not an ounce of non-violent strength is ever wasted. I must not, therefore, flatter myself with the belief — nor allow friends like you to entertain the belief — that I have exhibited any heroic and demonstrable non-violence in myself. All I can claim is that I am sailing in that direction without a moment's stop. This confession should strengthen your belief in non-violence and spur you and friends like you to action along the path."

*Harijan*, 11-1-'48, p. 504

## 24

### MY ETERNAL CREED

(The following paragraph is extracted from an article which appeared under the title "Not Argument, but Experience".)

For me non-violence, like truth, is my eternal creed for every activity. That I often fail to act up to it in many activities in my dealings with the sub-human family proves my weakness; it cannot and does not affect the truth of the creed or my faith in it. I am but a weak aspirant ever failing, ever trying. My failures make me more vigilant than before and intensify my faith. I can see with the eye of faith that the observance of the twin doctrine of truth and non-violence has possibilities of which we have but very inadequate conception.

*Harijan*, 14-9-'34, p. 244

## THE REAL TEST OF AHIMSA

(Originally appeared under the title "Mercy Versus Ruthlessness")

The virtues of mercy, non-violence, love and truth in any man can be truly tested only when they are pitted against ruthlessness, violence, hate and untruth.

If this is true, then it is incorrect to say that Ahimsa is of no avail before a murderer. It can certainly be said that to experiment with Ahimsa in face of a murderer is to seek self-destruction. But this is the real test of Ahimsa. He who gets himself killed out of sheer helplessness, however, can in nowise be said to have passed the test. He who when being killed bears no anger against his murderer and even asks God to forgive him is truly non-violent. History relates this of Jesus Christ. With his dying breath on the Cross, he is reported to have said: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We can get similar instances from other religions but the quotation is given because it is world famous.

It is another matter that our non-violence has not reached such heights. It would be wholly wrong for us to lower the standard of Ahimsa by reason of our own frailty or lack of experience. Without true understanding of the ideal, we can never hope to reach it. It is necessary for us, therefore, to apply our reason to understand the power of non-violence.

*Harijan*, 28-4-'46, p. 106

## AHIMSA — PASSIVE AND ACTIVE

There seems to be no historical warrant for the belief that an exaggerated practice of Ahimsa synchronized with our becoming bereft of manly virtues. During the past 1,500 years we have, as a nation, given ample proof of physical courage, but we have been torn by internal dissensions and have been dominated by love of self instead of love of country. We have, that is to say, been swayed by the spirit of irreligion rather than of religion.

I do not know how far the charge of unmanliness can be made good against the Jains. I hold no brief for them. By birth I am a Vaishnavite and was taught Ahimsa in my childhood. I have derived much religious benefit from Jain religious works as I have from scriptures of the other great faiths of the world. I owe much to the living company of the deceased philosopher, Rajachand Kavi who was a Jain by birth. Thus though my views on Ahimsa are a result of my study of most of the faiths of the world, they are now no longer dependent upon the authority of these works. They are a part of my life, and if I suddenly discovered that the religious books read by me bore a different interpretation from the one I had learnt to give them, I should still hold to the view of Ahimsa as I am about to set forth here.

Our Shastras seem to teach that a man who really practises Ahimsa in its fulness has the world at his feet; he so affects his surroundings that even the snakes and other venomous reptiles do him no harm. This is said to have been the experience of St. Francis of Assisi.

In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind. It may not, therefore, hurt the person of any wrong-doer or bear any ill-will to him and so cause him mental suffering. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrong-doer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill-will. It, therefore, does not prevent me from withdrawing from his



presence a child whom he, we shall imagine, is about to strike. Indeed, the proper practice of Ahimsa requires me to withdraw the intended victim from the wrong-doer, if am in any way whatsoever the guardian of such a child. It was therefore most proper for the passive resisters of South Africa to have resisted the evil that the Union Government sought to do to them. They bore no ill-will to it. They showed this by helping the Government whenever it needed their help. "Their resistance consisted of disobedience of the orders of the Government even to the extent of suffering death at their hands." Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer.

In its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa I *must love* my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. As man cannot deceive the loved one, he does not fear or frighten him or her. Gift of life is the greatest of all gifts; a man who gives it in reality, disarms all hostility. He has paved the way for an honourable understanding. And none who is himself subject to fear can bestow that gift. He must therefore be himself fearless. A man cannot then practise Ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of Ahimsa calls forth the greatest courage. It is the most soldierly of a soldier's virtue. General Gordon has been represented in a famous statue as bearing only a stick. This takes us far on the road to Ahimsa. But a soldier who needs the protection of even a stick, is to that extent so much the less a soldier. He is the true soldier who knows how to die and stand his ground in the midst of a hail of bullets. Such a one was Ambarisha, who stood his ground without lifting a finger though Durvasa did his worst. The Moors who were being pounded by the French gunners and who rushed to the guns' mouths with "Allah" on their lips, showed much the same type of courage. Only theirs was the courage of desparation. Ambarisha's was due to love. Yet the Moorish valour, readiness to die, conquered the gunners. They

frantically waved their hats, ceased firing, and greeted their erstwhile enemies as comrades. And so the South Africa passive resisters in their thousands were ready to die rather than sell their honour for a little personal ease. This was Ahimsa in its active form. It *never* barter away honour. A helpless girl in the hands of a follower of Ahimsa finds better and surer protection than in the hands of one who is prepared to defend her only to the point to which his weapons would carry him. The tyrant, in the first instance, will have to walk to his victim over the dead body of her defender; in the second he has but to overpower the defender; for it is assumed that the canon of propriety in the second instance will be satisfied when the defender has fought to the extent of his physical valour. In the first instance, as the defender has matched his very soul against the mere body of the tyrant, the odds are that the soul in the latter will be awakened and the girl would stand an infinitely greater chance of her honour being protected than in any other conceivable circumstance, barring of course that of her own personal courage.

If we are unmanly today, we are so, not because we do not know how to strike but because we fear to die. He is no follower of Mahavira, the apostle of Jainism, or of Buddha or of the Vedas who, being afraid to die, takes flight before any danger, real or imaginary, all the while wishing that somebody else would remove the danger by destroying the person causing it. He is no follower of Ahimsa who does not care a straw if he kills a man by inches by deceiving him in trade, or who would protect by force of arms a few cows and make away with the butcher or who, in order to do a supposed good to his country, does not mind killing off a few officials. All these are actuated by hatred, cowardice and fear. Here the love of the cow or the country is a vague thing intended to satisfy one's vanity or soothe a stinging conscience.

Ahimsa, truly understood, is in my humble opinion a panacea for all evils mundane and extra-mundane. We can never overdo it. Just at present we are not doing it at all. Ahimsa does not displace the practice of other virtues, but renders their practice imperatively necessary before



it can be practised even in its rudiments. Mahavira and Buddha were soldiers, and so was Tolstoy. Only they saw deeper and truer into their profession and found the secret of a true, happy, honourable and godly life. Let us be joint sharers with these teachers, and this land of ours will once more be the abode of gods.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Natesan & Co., 4th Edn.), p. 345

## 27

## NON-VIOLENCE OF THE BRAVE

(From "A Challenge to Faith")

The following is the question put to Gandhiji by the Associated Press of America and Gandhiji's answer.

*Q.*: What should one do in his day-to-day life — that is, what is the minimum programme — so that one can acquire non-violence of the brave?

*A.*: The minimum that is required of a person wishing to cultivate the Ahimsa of the brave is first to clear one's thought of cowardice and in the light of the clearance regulate his conduct in every activity, great or small. Thus the votary must refuse to be cowed down by his superior, without being angry. He must, however, be ready to sacrifice his post, however remunerative it may be. Whilst sacrificing his all, if the votary has no sense of irritation against his employer, he has Ahimsa of the brave in him. Assume that a fellow passenger threatens my son with assault and I reason with the would-be assailant who then turns upon me. If then I take his blow with grace and dignity, without harbouring any ill-will against him, I exhibit the Ahimsa of the brave. Such instances are of every day occurrence and can be easily multiplied. If I succeed in curbing my temper every time and though able to give blow for blow I refrain, I shall develop the Ahimsa of the brave which will never fail me and which will compel recognition from the most confirmed adversaries.

*Harijan*, 17-11-'46, p. 404



## NON-VIOLENCE, NO DOCTRINE OF INACTION

(Originally appeared under the title "A Challenge")

I have before me three letters rebuking me for not going to Sindh to face the Hurs personally. Two are friendly. The third comes from a critic who has no faith in non-violence. His letter demands an answer. Its main part runs as follows:

"I am deeply interested in your writings and in the effect that they make upon the minds of the ignorant masses and your blind followers. I would therefore feel obliged if you enlighten me on the following points, especially because points Nos. 3 and 4 raise novel and fundamental issues about non-violence.

"You have been training a number of Satyagrahis in your Ashram and they must have had the advantage of your supervision and instructions. You have been proclaiming that violence could be effectively met by non-violent means. Japan is now attacking India in the East and Hurs are creating trouble in the West. Is this not then the long-awaited opportunity when you can practise what you have so long preached?

"Instead of doing that, you are contenting yourself with writing articles in *Harijan*. Imagine Hitler or Stalin, without sending their armies to the front line, writing such articles in *Pravda* or such other paper. Instead of asking the Sindh M.L.A.s to resign and go to the Hurs, why should you not send a 'company' of your trained Satyagrahis and try the luck of your doctrine?

"Is it not the duty and business of a Satyagrahi to go and meet the danger where it exists and threatens the country? Or is it your case that your Satyagrahis will meet it only when it reaches the Ashram and not before? If so, is not your doctrine a doctrine of inaction?"

I have no doubt that if I could have gone to Sindh, I might have been able to do something, I have done such things before, not without success. But I am too old for such missions. What little energy I have, I am storing up for what promises to be the last fight of my life.

I have not conceived my mission to be that of a knight-errant wandering everywhere to deliver people from difficult situations. My humble occupation has been to show people how they can solve their own difficulties. So far as Sindh is concerned, I maintain that my advice was perfect. It was clearly Congressmen's duty to proceed to the infested areas and spend themselves in the effort to convert the Hurs to the way of peace. Indeed they could have used arms if they had no faith in non-violence. They should have resigned from the Congress to free themselves from the obligation to observe non-violence. If we are to be fit for independence, we have to learn the art of self-defence either non-violently or violently. Every citizen should consider himself liable to render help to his neighbour in distress.

If I had adopted the role my critic has suggested, I would have helped people to become parasites. Therefore it is well that I have not trained myself to defend others. I shall be satisfied if at my death it could be said of me that I had devoted the best part of my life to showing the way to become self-reliant and cultivate the capacity to defend oneself under every conceivable circumstance.

My correspondent has committed the grave error of thinking that my mission is to deliver people from calamities. That is an arrogation only claimed by dictators. But no dictator has ever succeeded in proving the claim.

Indeed if I could say, as the correspondent thinks I could, that if the menaces of the kind described by him face the Ashram, it will give a good account of itself, I should be quite content and feel that my mission was wholly successful. But I can lay no such claim. The Ashram at Sevagram is only so-called. The visitors gave it the name and it has passed current. The Ashram is a medley of people come together for different purposes. There are hardly half a dozen permanent residents having a common ideal. How these few will discharge themselves when the test comes remains to be seen.

The fact is that non-violence does not work in the same way as violence. It works in the opposite way. An armed man naturally relies upon his arms. A man who is



intentionally unarmed relies upon the unseen Force called God by poets, but called the unknown by scientists. But that which is unknown is not necessarily non-existent. God is the Force among all forces known and unknown. Non-violence without reliance upon that Force is poor stuff to be thrown in the dust.

I hope now my critic realizes the error underlying his question and that he sees also that the doctrine that has guided my life is not one of inaction but of the highest action. His questions should really have been put thus:

How is it that, in spite of your work in India for over 22 years, there are not sufficient Satyagrahis who can cope with external and internal menaces?

My answer then would be that twenty-two years are nothing in the training of a nation for the development of non-violent strength. That is not to say that a large number of persons will not show that strength on due occasion. That occasion seems to have come now. This war puts the civilian on his mettle no less than the military man, non-violent no less than the violent.

*Harijan*, 28-6-'42, p. 201

## LOVE, A SOCIAL VIRTUE

(Originally appeared under the title "Love, a Universal Virtue")

An Indian Christian correspondent wrote to Gandhiji that the article of Gandhiji, "The Jews" had evoked considerable comment of varying nature and one of the criticisms levelled was that the love that Jesus taught was a personal, not a social or collective virtue. And he went on to elucidate how the denial that Jesus' way of life was meant for all, collectively no less than individually, was to deny the basic truth of the religion of Christ.

Gandhiji's comment thereon was as under:

This letter should convince honest doubters that the love that Jesus taught and practised was not a mere personal virtue, but that it was essentially a social and



collective virtue. Buddha taught and practised the same thing six hundred years before Jesus.

*Harijan*, 4-3-'39, p. 38

## 30

## NON-VIOLENCE NOT A MONOPOLY OF THE FEW

(The following extract is culled out from an article originally published under the title "Mass Action".)

If non-violence could not affect masses of mankind, it is a waste of effort for individuals to cultivate it. I hold it to be the greatest gift of God. And all God's gifts are the common heritage of His creation and not a monopoly of cloistered monks or nuns. They may specialize in non-violence, they may teach us its wonderful effects, but if their discoveries and their claims are sound they must be adaptable by masses. If truth be not a monopoly of the few why should non-violence, its counterpart, be otherwise? My reverent study of the scriptures of the world has led me to the belief that all register emphatic and unequivocal testimony in favour of non-violence being practised by all not merely singly but collectively as well. In all humility I have often felt that having no axes to grind and having by nature a detached mind, I give a truer interpretation of the Hindu, Christian, Islamic or other scriptures. For this humble claim I anticipate the forgiveness of Sanatanists, Christians and Musalmans.

*Young India*, 24-4-'30, p. 141

## NON-VIOLENCE AND TRUTH NO CLOISTERED VIRTUES

(From the summary by M. D. of Gandhiji's concluding discourse at Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting which appeared under the title "The Concluding Discourse")

How can inconcrete entities like truth and non-violence be organized as the Sangh is expected to do? I maintain that they can be so organized. Otherwise they would for me cease to be eternal principles. An eternal principle, as the Jains say, has no exceptions. Truth and non-violence are thus no cloistered virtues but applicable as much in the forum and the legislatures as in the market place.

Truth and non-violence are not for the dense. Pursuit of them is bound to result in an all-round growth of the body, mind and heart. If this does not follow, either truth and non-violence are untrue or we are untrue, and since the former is impossible the latter will be the only conclusion.

*Harijan*, 8-5-'37, p. 97 at p. 98

## ON THE VERGE OF IT

After putting the questions he has, a correspondent thus concludes his letter:

"I hope you will be courteous enough to throw light on these points and continue to discuss with me until I do not talk nonsense. I am your follower and have gone to jail under your leadership and guidance. I have never gone to see and talk to you even when I was very near of you and had ample opportunity, simply because I hated to encroach upon your time. I have not even touched your feet. I now feel very much shaken in my faith in your reasoning and politics. I am not a revolutionary, but I am on the verge of being a revolutionary. If you answer these questions satisfactorily you may save me."

I now take his questions seriatim:

1. What is non-violence, an attitude of the mind or non-destruction of life? If it be the latter, is it possible to translate it into practice and carry it to its logical consequences when we destroy numberless lives daily in taking our meals etc.? We cannot even eat vegetables in that case.

Non-violence is both an attitude of mind and action consequent upon it. No doubt there is life in vegetables. But the taking of vegetable life is inevitable. It is none the less destruction of life: Only it may be regarded as excusable.

The second question is:

2. If we cannot avoid destroying life, it certainly does not mean that we should recklessly destroy it; but then, in proved cases of necessity it cannot be objected to on principle. It may be objected to on expediency.

Even in proved cases of necessity violence cannot be defended 'on principle'. It may be defended on grounds of expedience.

The third question is:

3. If non-violence is non-destruction of life, how can you consistently ask anybody to give up his own life in a cause however holy and righteous it may be? Would that not be violence to one's own self?

I can consistently ask a person to give up his life for a cause and yet not be guilty of violence. For non-violence means refraining from injury to others.

The fourth is:

4. It is human nature to love one's own life. If one should sacrifice one's life when necessary for his country and people, why should he not sacrifice the lives of others when necessary? We have only to prove whether it was necessary. It is, therefore, a matter of expediency again.

'He that shall love his own life shall lose it. He that shall lose his own life shall find it.' Sacrifice of the lives of others cannot be justified on grounds of necessity, for it is impossible to prove necessity. We may not be judges ourselves. The sole judge must be those whose lives we should take. One good reason for non-violence is our fallible judgment. The inquisitors implicitly believed in the righteousness



of their deeds, but we now know that they were wholly wrong.

The fifth question is:

5. What is the difference between sacrifice and murder?

Sacrifice consists in suffering in one's own person so that others may benefit. Murder consists in making others suffer unto death so that the murderer, or those others for whom he murders may benefit.

The sixth question is:

6. Is a doctor, who operates upon you, condemnable for he is violent in giving you trouble temporarily? Do we not praise him all the more for that, — looking not to his violent action but to his attitude of mind which is to give relief to the patient?

This is a misuse of the word violence which means causing injury to another without his consent or without doing any good to him. In my case the surgeon caused me temporary pain with my written and willing consent and for my sole good. A revolutionary murders or robs not for the good of his victims, whom he often considers to be fit only to be injured, for the supposed good of society.

His seventh question is:

7. Is not physical force as much a potent factor of life as any other force? As non-violence can be taken by cowards as a garb to cover their cowardice, so can violence be misused by brutes and tyrants. It does not prove that violence of itself is bad.

Physical force undoubtedly is a potent factor of life. Violence has certainly been-misused by tyrants, but in the sense in which I have defined violence, its good use is inconceivable. See the definition in the answer to the preceding question.

The eighth question is:

8. You will put lunatics and dangerous criminals, who are a nuisance to society in prisons. Will you allow....

I am not sure that it is right to put lunatics or criminals, dangerous or otherwise, in prisons, i.e. for punishment. Lunatics are not so put even now. And we are reaching a time when even criminals will be put under restraint for their ultimate reform, not for their punishment....

The ninth question is:

9. What is more inhuman and terrible, rather what is more violent, to let 33 millions suffer, stagnate and perish, or a few thousand be killed? What would you prefer, to see the slow death of a mass of 33 millions through sheer degeneration, or killing of a few hundred of people? This certainly is to be proved that the killing of a few hundred will stop the degeneration of 33 millions. But then, it is a matter of detail and not principle. It may be later on discussed whether it is expedient or not. But if it is proved that by killing a few hundred, we can put a stop to the degeneration of 33 millions, will you object to violence on principle?

There is no principle worth the name if it is not wholly good. I swear by non-violence because I know that it alone conduces to the highest good of mankind, not merely in the next world but in this also. I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. I do not believe that the killing of even every Englishman can do the slightest good to India. The millions will be just as badly off as they are today, if some one made it possible to kill off every Englishman tomorrow. The responsibility is more ours than that of the English for the present state of things. The English will be powerless to do evil if we will but do good. Hence my incessant emphasis on reform from within.

But before the revolutionary I have urged non-violence not on the highest ground of morality but on the lower ground of expedience. I contend that the revolutionary method cannot succeed in India. If an open warfare were a possibility, I may concede that we may tread the path of violence that the other countries have and at least evolve the qualities that bravery on the battlefield brings forth. But attainment of Swaraj through warfare I hold to be an impossibility for any time that we can foresee. Warfare may give us another rule for the English rule but not self-rule in terms of the masses. The pilgrimage to Swaraj is a painful climb. It requires attention to details. It means vast organizing ability, it means penetration into the villages solely for the service of the villagers. In other words it means national education, i.e. education of the masses. It means an awakening of national consciousness among



the masses. It will not spring like the magician's mango. It will grow almost unperceived like the Banian tree. A bloody revolution will never perform the trick. Haste here is most certainly waste. The revolution of the spinning wheel is the quickest revolution conceivable.

The tenth and the last question is:

10. Is not all logic and reason discarded where vital interests of life are concerned? Is it not a fact that a few selfish, tyrant and obdurate men may, as they do, refuse to listen to reason and continue to rule, tyrannize and do injustice to a mass of people? Lord Krishna failed to bring about a settlement peacefully between the obdurate Kauravas and Pandavas. Mahabharata may be a fiction. Poor Krishna may be less spiritual. But even you failed to persuade your judge to resign from his post and not convict you, whom even he, as everybody else, regarded innocent. How can persuasion through self-sacrifice be successful in such cases?

It is sad but true that where so-called vital interests are concerned logic and reason are thrown to the wind. Tyrants are indeed obdurate. The English tyrant is obduracy personified. But he is a multi-headed monster. He refuses to be killed. He cannot be paid in his own coin, for he has left none to pay him with. I have a coin that is not cast in his mint and he cannot steal it. It is superior to any he has yet produced. It is non-violence; and the symbol of it is the spinning wheel. I have, therefore presented it to the country with the fullest confidence. Krishna failed to do nothing he wished to, so says the author of the Mahabharata. He was omnipotent. It is futile to drag Krishna from His heights. If He has to be judged as a mere mortal, I fear He will fare badly and will have to take a back seat. Mahabharata is neither history nor fiction commonly so called. It is the history of the human soul in which God as Krishna is the chief actor. There are many things in that poem that my poor understanding cannot fathom. There are many things in it which are obvious interpolations. It is not a treasure chest. It is a mine which needs to be explored, which needs to be dug deep and from which diamonds have to be extracted after removing much foreign matter. Therefore, I would urge my friends, the full-fledged revolutionaries, or those in the making, or on the verge of being



such, to keep their feet firm on mother earth and not scale the Himalayan heights to which the poet took Arjuna and his other heroes. Anyway, I must respectfully refuse even to attempt the ascent. The planes of Hindustan are good enough for me.

To descend to the planes then, let the questioner understand that I had not gone to the court to persuade the judge of my innocence. But on the contrary, I went there to plead fully guilty and ask for the highest penalty. For the breach by me of the man-made law was deliberate. The judge did not, could not, believe me to be innocent. There was not much sacrifice in undergoing the imprisonment. True sacrifice is made of sterner stuff. Let my friend understand the implications of non-violence. It is a process of conversion. I am convinced. I must be pardoned for saying it that my out and out non-violence has converted many more Englishmen than any amount of threats or deeds of violence. I know that when conscious non-violence becomes general in India, Swaraj will not be far.

*Young India*, 21-5-'25, p. 177

### 33

## LIMITS TO THE PRACTICE OF AHIMSA IN LIFE

(Originally appeared under the title "How to Live" in the columns of "Notes")

On reading an article of his in *Young India*, a correspondent sent Mr. Andrews the following poser which he handed to me for reply some months ago:

"I was born and bred in a village. My father used to repeat *Ahimsa paramo dharmah* off and on, while engaged in religious conversations with his friends. It is, as you say, the complimentary truth following from the original truth of the *advaitam*. Let me admit the truth substantially. Let me further submit that *advaitam* is not confined to oneness of all spiritual life. It is, as you appear to hold, the oneness of all things in the universe, without any exception of whatever kind.

"The moment one gets himself fitted to catch *advaitam* as his guide, his progress is assured. All differences must disappear.

We are all one. How am I justified in injuring that which is myself? Here doubts begin to crop up. Is the idea of Ahimsa to be carried into practice to its logical end? If so carried to the end, will it remain a virtue?

“My father used to repeat *Ahimsa paramo dharmah*. However when the family buffalo took into its — why not her — head not to stand still for being milked, my father used to take up the stick and beat her to her senses. That was for securing milk for his children. Did he do the right thing?

“The Hindus call the Avatar of Rama as Dharma Avatar. Rama killed Ravana. Was it a wrong deed? Rama killed Bali and Bali protesting, Rama replied:

अनुजवधू भगिनी सुतनारी  
सुनु सठ ये कन्या सम चारी  
इन्हें कुदृष्टि विलोकहि जोई  
तेहि वधे कछु पाप न होई

Here there is the doctrine of ‘Killing no murder’ put in the mouth of the very Avatar of Dharma.

“We may descend further and come to the time of Lord Krishna. Here we have the Bhagavadgita. Arjun is unwilling to kill who are after all his nearest relations. Lord Krishna urges him to fight and ‘kill’ and the doctrine of Ahimsa is left in the background.

“One has thus to enquire whether there is a limit to the practice of Ahimsa. A girl is being outraged. Is she not justified in killing the devil to escape from his clutches? Is she to observe non-violence?

“Catching fish is violence. Uprooting plants for use as vegetable is violence. Use of disinfectants for germs of disease is violence. How to live?

— A Brahmin”

If the father had not milked the unwilling buffalo, the world will have lost nothing. There are many things put in the mouth of Rama by Tulasidas which I do not understand. The whole episode about Bali is of that type. The literal application of the lines attributed to Rama by Tulasidas will land the doer in trouble if it will not send him to the gallows. Everything related of every hero in Ramayana or Mahabharata I do not take literally, nor



do I take these books as historical records. They give us essential truths in a variety of ways. Nor do I regard Rama and Krishna as portrayed in the two poems as infallible beings. They reflect the thoughts and aspirations of their ages. Only an infallible person can do justice to the lives of infallible beings. One can therefore only take the spirit of these great works for only guidance, the letter will smother one and stop all growth. So far as the Gita is concerned, I do not regard it as a historical discourse. It takes a physical illustration to drive home a spiritual truth. It is the description not of a war between cousins but between the two natures in us — the good and the evil. I would suggest to 'A Brahmin' an examination of the doctrine of Ahimsa apart from the incidents he quotes. *Ahimsa paramo dharmah* is one of the highest truths of life. Any fall from it must be regarded as a fall. Euclid's straight line may not be capable of being drawn on a black-board. But the impossibility of the task cannot be permitted to alter the definition. Judged by that test even the uprooting of a plant is an evil. And who does not feel a pang on plucking a beautiful rose? That we do not feel a pang on plucking a weed does not affect the doctrine. It shows that we do not know the place of weeds in nature. Therefore all injury is a violation of the doctrine of Ahimsa. The fullest application of Ahimsa does make life impossible. Then let the truth remain though we may all perish. The teachers of old have carried the doctrine to its logical extent and laid down that the physical life is an evil, an embarrassment. *Moksha* is a bodyless superphysical state in which there is neither drinking nor eating and therefore neither the milking of a buffalo nor the plucking even of a weed. It may be difficult for us to grasp or appreciate the truth, it may be and is impossible fully to live up to it. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that it is the truth. And virtue lies in regulating our lives in accordance with it and to the best of our ability. A true perception is half the battle. Life becomes livable and lovable only to the extent that we apply the grand doctrine in actual practice. For then we hold the flesh in bondage rather than live in perpetual bondage to the flesh.



## VIOLENCE IN AGRICULTURE ?

A constant reader of *Navajivan* asks:

“I have read in *Navajivan* that agriculture is pure *Yajna* (sacrifice), true service of man.

“One is pained if he even by mistake treads down a little ant! But what of the agriculturist who witnesses thousands of such creatures being killed in the process of his agricultural operations? Is it not that a daily repetition of these operations makes him callous? How can one who cannot bear seeing even an ant being destroyed engage himself in agriculture which by its very nature involves so much violence? Should not he rather support himself by begging or some other occupation? But begging is a most detestable occupation, I know. I would love very much to take up agriculture, but the violence involved, and the spiked goads that are used for driving bullocks scare me away.”

Agriculture does indeed involve destruction of innumerable little creatures. But even so the process of life, i.e. breathing — involves an equal amount of destruction. But just as you do not destroy the body by committing suicide, even so by running away from agriculture you cannot destroy agriculture. Man is an image of earth, of earth is his body composed, and from the component parts of earth does it derive its sustenance. He who lives on alms to escape the evils attendant on agriculture is guilty of a double wrong. He makes himself guilty of the violence involved in agriculture, because the food begged is the product of some one's agricultural labour. And the second wrong is that of ignorance and the consequent idleness of the man who lives on alms.

If agriculture is a forbidden occupation for one, it is not the less so for others. If many live on alms, a few agriculturists would have to groan under the burden of labouring for the bread of those many. Would they not be guilty of that sin?

The violence involved in agriculture and such other necessary occupations is as inevitable as that involved in

the maintenance of the body. It does not cease to be violence, but being inevitable it involves less guilt, and man can absolve himself, from this guilt by *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) and other spiritual means, and ultimately attain *moksha*. That is how the body is for man at once a means of bondage and emancipation. In the same way he who engages himself in agriculture with the object of becoming a millionaire turns agriculture into an instrument of bondage. He, who does so for bare maintenance, converts it into an instrument of emancipation. All *karma*, all activity, all occupation involves violence in some form or other. All necessary occupations involve same amount of violence. Pearl fishing, silk manufacture, gold manufacture involve more violence than agriculture, inasmuch as they are not occupations necessary for life. The heart bows in reverence to the sage who evolved the religion of Ahimsa out of the surrounding mass of chaotic Himsa.

Of course it is a primary duty to go about without hurting even an ant. A man who proudly struts about regardless of the numerous insects and living things that he treads upon, deliberately commits sin and chooses the pathway to perdition. He cannot at all be placed side by side with the comparatively innocent agriculturist. Hundreds of such agriculturists save ants and other creatures with scrupulous care that come in their way. There is no arrogance about them. They are humble. They are the salt of the earth. Nine-tenths of the world's population are engaged in agriculture. It blesses the earth and is therefore a pure and necessary sacrifice. Any one, therefore, who is virtuously inclined may engage himself in this occupation renouncing all the unnecessary ones and thus earn merit for himself.

The objection about the spiked goads does not apply to all agriculturists. Many treat their animals as members of their own family and bestow on them the same care and affection that they do on their children.

*Young India*, 24-9-'25, p. 327



## NO LIMITATIONS

A correspondent says in substance:

“Individual Ahimsa I can understand. Corporate Ahimsa between friends is also intelligible. But you talk of Ahimsa towards avowed enemies. This is like a mirage. It will be a mercy if you give up this obstinacy of yours. If you do not, you will forfeit the esteem you enjoy. What is worse, you being considered a *Mahatma*, mislead many credulous persons to their own and society's harm.”

That non-violence which only an individual can use is not of much use in terms of society. Man is a social being. His accomplishments to be of use must be such as any person with sufficient diligence can attain. That which can be exercised only among friends is of value only as a spark of non-violence. It cannot merit the appellation of Ahimsa. ‘Enmity vanishes before Ahimsa’ is a great aphorism. It means that the greatest enmity requires an equal measure of Ahimsa for its abatement. Cultivation of this virtue may need long practice, even extending to several births. It does not become useless on that account. Travelling along the route, the pilgrim will meet richer experience from day to day so that he may have a glimpse of the beauty he is destined to see at the top. This will add to his zest. No one is entitled to infer from this that the path will be a continuous carpet of roses without thorns. A poet has sung that the way to reach God accrues only to the very brave, never to the faint-hearted. The atmosphere today is so much saturated with poison that one refuses to recollect the wisdom of the ancients and to perceive the varied little experience of Ahimsa in action. “A bad turn is neutralized by a good,” is a wise saying of daily experience in practice. Why can we not see that if the sum total of the world's activities was destructive, it would have come to an end long ago? Love, otherwise Ahimsa, sustains this planet of ours.

This much must be admitted. The precious grace of life has to be strenuously cultivated, naturally so because



it is uplifting. Descent is easy not so ascent. A large majority of us being undisciplined, our daily experience is that of fighting or swearing at one another on the slightest pretext.

This, the richest grace of Ahimsa will descend easily upon the owner of hard discipline.

*Harijan*, 14-12-'47, p. 468

### 36

## WHY AGAINST VIOLENCE ?

A correspondent argues:

“Why are you against violence? Do you think that every act of violence is an expression of Himsa? Is it not strange that we should feel a kind of horror, pity and disgust when we see a murder or assassination, and silently witness the slow sucking of blood going on every day in the world? If one believes that a successful bloody revolution would ameliorate a good deal of misery in the world, why should he not resort to arms? You seem to be very optimistic about human nature, though I often read of your bitter experiences about it. Don't you realize that the rulers of the world have become so callous that, to understand you or humanity, they must again become children. I don't mean to say they are born bad. But their badness is a physical fact and, in spite of themselves, they cannot alter it.”

It is because the rulers, if they are bad, are so, not necessarily or wholly by reason of birth, but because of their environment, that I have hopes of their altering their course. It is perfectly true, as the writer says, that the rulers cannot alter their course themselves. If they are dominated by their environment, they do not surely deserve to be killed, but should be changed by a change of environment. But the environment are we — the people who make the rulers what they are. They are thus an exaggerated edition of what we are in the aggregate. If my argument is sound, any violence done to the rulers would be violence done to ourselves. It would be suicide. And since I do not want to commit suicide, nor encourage my neighbours to do so, I become non-violent myself and invite my neighbours to do likewise.

Moreover, violence may destroy one or more bad rulers, but, like Ravana's heads, others will pop up in their places, for, the root lies elsewhere. It lies in us. If we will reform ourselves, the rulers will automatically do so.

The correspondent seems to imagine that a non-violent person has no feelings and that he is a silent witness to the 'slow sucking of blood going on every day in the world'. Non-violence is not a passive force nor so helpless as the correspondent will make it out to be. Barring truth, if truth is to be considered apart from non-violence, the latter is the activist force in the world. It never fails. Violence only seemingly succeeds, and nobody has ever claimed uniform success for violence. Non-violence never promises immediate and tangible results. It is not a mango trick. Its failures are, therefore, all seeming. A believer in violence will kill the murderer and boast of his act. But he never killed murder. By murdering the murderer, he added to it and probably invited more. The law of retaliation is the law of multiplying evil.

A non-violent man will act upon the murderer through his love. He cannot, by punishing the murderer, undo the murder already committed. But he hopes by gentleness to get the murderer to repent of his deed and change the whole course of his life. A non-violent man always and automatically turns the searchlight self-ward and discovers that the best course of conduct is to do unto others as he would have others to do unto him. If he was the murderer, he would not like to be killed for his madness but would like the opportunity of mending himself. He knows, too, that he must not destroy what he cannot create. God is the sole Judge between man and man.

*Harijan*, 21-9-'34, p. 250

## YOU CANNOT HAVE TOO MUCH OF REAL AHIMSA

(From an undated letter by Gandhiji to Prof. P. G. Mathews)

You cannot have too much of real Ahimsa but the average Jain has made of it as of fasting a travesty. The average Jain only knows the husk of Ahimsa and misses the kernel. Ahimsa is endless love for all life and therefore an eternal readiness to give up one's life for saving others.

*Harijan*, 12-12-'48, p. 346

## ATTAINING A MENTAL STATE OF LOVE OR NON-VIOLENCE

(The following extracts are an answer by Gandhiji to a question put to him after one of his discourses at the evening prayer on board S.S. Rajputana during his voyage to London and originally appeared in a letter by M.D. under the title "From S.S. Rajputana—III".)

It takes a fairly strenuous course of training to attain to a mental state of non-violence. In daily life it has to be a course of discipline though we may not like it, like for instance the life of a soldier. But I agree that unless there is a hearty co-operation of the mind the mere outward observance will be simply a mask, harmful both to the man himself and to others. The perfect state is reached only when mind and body and speech are in proper co-ordination. But it is always a case of intense mental struggle. It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance, but I succeed on almost all occasions to keep my feelings under control. Whatever may be the result, there is always in me a conscious struggle for following the law of non-violence deliberately and ceaselessly. Such a struggle leaves one stronger for it. Non-violence is a weapon of the strong. With the weak it might easily be hypocrisy. Fear and love are contradictory terms. Love is reckless in giving away, oblivious as to what it gets in return. Love wrestles with



the world as with itself and ultimately gains a mastery over all other feelings. My daily experience, as of those who are working with me, is that every problem would lend itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and non-violence the law of life. For truth and non-violence, are to me, faces of the same coin.

Whether mankind will consciously follow the law of love I do not know. But that need not perturb us. The law will work, just as the law of gravitation will work whether we accept it or no. And just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the laws of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work greater wonders. For the force of non-violence is infinitely more wonderful and subtle than the forces of nature, like for instance electricity. The man who discovered for us the law of love was a far greater scientist than any of our modern scientists. Only our explorations have not gone far enough and so it is not possible for every one to see all its workings. Such, at any rate, is the hallucination, if it is one, under which I am labouring. The more I work at this law the more I feel the delight in life, the delight in the scheme of this universe. It gives me a peace and a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have no power to describe.

*Young India*, 1-10-'31, p. 285 at p. 287

## PEACE FROM INNER STRENGTH

(The following extract is taken from an article by M.D. which appeared under the title "Talks before the Trek". In the article Gandhiji's replies to questions put to him by visitors are noted.)

If I harbour ill-will in my heart but do not express it in acts, I am still violent. By non-violence or peace I mean the peace which comes through inner strength. If I have that peace, that non-violence, I won't have any hate in me. Violence does not necessarily mean bodily harm. What I want to impress on everyone is that I do not want India to reach her goal through questionable means.

Whether that is possible or not is another question. It is sufficient for my present purpose if the person who thinks out the plan and leads the people is absolutely above-board and has non-violence and truth in him. Non-violence works organically, not mechanically. It was for that reason that I asked for unrestricted authority from the Working Committee of the Congress to work out my plan of non-violence.

*Young India*, 20-3-'30, p. 98

#### IV FEARLESSNESS

40

#### FEARLESSNESS

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

Every reader of the Gita knows, that fearlessness heads the list of the Divine Attributes enumerated in the 16th chapter. Whether this is merely due to the exigencies of metre, or whether the pride of place has been deliberately yielded to fearlessness, is more than I can say. In my opinion, however, fearlessness richly deserves the first rank assigned to it. For it is indispensable for the growth of the other noble qualities. How can one seek Truth, or cherish Love, without fearlessness? As Pritam says, 'the path of Hari (the Lord) is the path of the brave, not of cowards.' Hari here means Truth, and the brave are those armed with fearlessness, not with the sword, the rifle and the like. These are taken up only by those who are possessed by fear.

Fearlessness connotes freedom from all external fear, — fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing reputation or giving offence, and so on. One who overcomes the fear of death does not surmount all other fears, as is commonly but erroneously supposed. Some of us do not fear death, but flee from the minor ills of life. Some are ready to die themselves, but cannot bear their loved ones being taken away from them. Some misers will put up with all this, will part even with their lives, but not their property; others



will do any number of black deeds in order to uphold their supposed prestige. Some will swerve from the strait and narrow path, which lies clear before them, simply because they are afraid of incurring the world's odium. The seeker after Truth must conquer all these fears. He should be ready to sacrifice his all in the quest of Truth, even as Harishchandra did. The story of Harishchandra may be only a parable; but every seeker will bear witness to its truth from his personal experience, and therefore that story is as precious as any historical fact.

Perfect fearlessness can be attained only by him who has realized the Supreme, as it implies freedom from delusions. One can always progress towards this goal by determined and constant endeavour, and by cultivating self-confidence.

As I have stated at the very outset, we must give up all external fears. But the internal foes we must always fear. We are rightly afraid of animal passion, anger, and the like. External fears cease of their own accord, when once we have conquered these traitors within the camp. All such fears revolve round the body as the centre, and will therefore disappear, as we get rid of attachment for the body. We thus find, that all external fear is the baseless fabric of our own vision. Fear has no place in our hearts, when we have shaken off attachment for wealth, for family and for the body. 'Enjoy the things of the earth by renouncing them'\* is a noble precept. Wealth, family and body will be there, just the same; we have only to change our attitude towards them. All these are not ours, but God's. Nothing whatever in this world is ours. Even we ourselves are His. Why then should we entertain any fears? The Upanishad therefore directs us 'to give up attachment for things, while we enjoy them'. That is to say, we must be interested in them, not as proprietors, but only as trustees. He, on whose behalf we hold them, will give us the strength and the weapons requisite for defending them against all usurpers. When we thus cease to be masters, and reduce ourselves to the rank of servants, humbler than the very dust under our feet, all fears will roll away like mists; we shall attain

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\* तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः । ईशोपनिषद् ।



ineffable peace, and see Satyanarayan (the God of Truth) face to face.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. VII

## 41

## FEAR KILLS THE SOUL

(The following extracts are taken from speeches of Gandhiji addressed to the terrorized peasants in Orissa, which were summarized by M. D. in his "Weekly Letter".)

"Fear is worse than disease. The man who fears man falls from the estate of man. Fear God alone."

"Fear is a worse disease than malaria or *kala azar*; these diseases kill the body, fear kills the soul. A fear-stricken man can never know God, and one who knows God will never fear a mortal man. Shake yourselves free of fear which threatens your very existence."

*Young India*, 22-12-'27, p. 429

## 42

## ANATOMY OF FEAR

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Gandhiji described the anatomy of fear in minute detail in the course of a written message which was read out to the prayer gathering at Kazirkhil on the evening of the 18th (Monday). In fact it has become the central theme of all his addresses these days. "The more I go about in these parts," he observed, "the more I find that your worst enemy is fear. It eats into the vitals of the terror-stricken as well as the terrorist. The latter fears something in his victim. It may be his different religion or his riches he fears. The second kind of fear is otherwise known as greed. If you search enough, you will find that greed is a variety of fear. But there has never been and will never be a man who is able to intimidate one who has cast out fear from his heart. Why can no one intimidate the fearless?

You will find that God is always by the side of the fearless. Therefore, we should fear Him alone and seek His protection. All other fear will then by itself disappear. Till fearlessness is cultivated by the people, there will never be any peace in these parts for the Hindus, or for the Musalmans."

*Harijan*, 8-12-'46, p. 442

### 43

## A MAN OF PRAYERS KNOWS NO FEAR

(On his return from England after the failure of the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji camped in Bombay in order to make further efforts to achieve peace with honour but the Viceroy spurned the olive branch and Gandhiji was arrested on 4th January 1932 in the quiet of night. Just the day before, i.e. on 3rd January, at the four o'clock morning prayer, he delivered a stirring little message to the people which was as much a religious sermon as a call to the country in a unique crisis. It appeared in the feature "The Historic Week — 28th December 1931 - 4th January 1932" by M. D.)

You have been my companions in these prayers for some days, and now that the struggle is resumed again and I may be taken away any moment, I hope you will continue to have your prayers regularly morning and evening. Let it become a daily obligatory ritual for you. Prayer plays a large part in a self-purificatory sacrifice and you will see that it will be a veritable cow of plenty for you, and will make your way clear. The more you apply yourselves to it, the more fearlessness you will experience in daily life, for fearlessness is a sign and symbol of self-purification. I do not know a man or a woman who was on the path of self-purification and was still obsessed by fear. Generally there are two kinds of fears in men's minds — fear of death and fear of loss of material possessions. A man of prayer and self-purification will shed the fear of death and embrace death as a boon companion and will regard all earthly possessions as fleeting and of no account. He will see that he has no right to possess wealth when misery and pauperism stalk the land and when there are millions who have to go

without a meal. No power on earth can subdue a man who has shed these two fears. But for that purpose the prayer should be a thing of the heart and not a thing of outward demonstration. It must take us daily nearer to God, and a prayerful man is sure to have his heart's desire fulfilled, for the simple reason that he will never have an improper desire. Continue this ritual and you will shed lustre not only on your city but on our country. I hope this brief prayer of mine will find a lodgment in your heart.

*Young India*, 7-1-'32, p. 6 at p. 8

## 44

## OVERCOMING FEAR

(From "Question Box")

I have cultivated the habit of not anticipating evil. I am able to know the remedy instinctively when I am face to face with an evil. That is how a God-fearing man acts. The fear of God disposes of every other fear.

*Harijan*, 17-5-'42, p. 157 at p. 158

## 45

## PANIC

Nowadays one reads about panic in the Press and hears more than one reads. One friend writes, "You sitting in lonely Sevagram can have no notion of the talks and whispers going on in the busy cities. Panic has seized them."

Panic is the most demoralizing state anyone can be in. There never is any cause for panic. One must keep heart whatever happens. War is an unmitigated evil. But it certainly does one good thing, it drives away fear and brings bravery to the surface. Several million lives must have been already lost between the Allies and the Germans. They have been wasting blood like water. Old men, women both old and young, and children in Britain and France are living in the midst of imminent death. But there is no panic there. If they were seized by panic, it would be an



enemy more dreadful than German bullets, bombs and poison gas. Let us learn from these suffering nations of the West and banish panic from our midst. And in India there is no cause whatsoever for panic. Britain will die hard and heroically even if she has to. We may hear of reverses, but we will not hear of demoralization. Whatever happens will happen in an orderly manner.

Therefore I would say to those who lend a listening ear to me: "Go on with your work or business in the usual way. Do not withdraw your deposits or make haste to turn your paper into cash. If you are cautious, you will run no new risks. Your metal buried underground or in your treasure chests need not be considered safer than in banks or in paper if anarchy overtakes us. There is risk just now in everything. It is best to be as you are in such a condition. Your steadiness, if it is multiplied, will steady the market. It will be the best preventive against anarchy. There is undoubtedly fear of *goondaism* in such times. You must be prepared to cope with it yourself. *Goondas* flourish only in the midst of timid people. They will have no quarter from people who can defend themselves violently or non-violently. Non-violent defence presupposes recklessness about one's life and property. If it is persisted in, it will in the end be a sure cure for *goondaism*. But non-violence cannot be learnt in a day. It requires practice. You can commence to learn it from now. You must be ready to lose your life or property or both. But that is implied in the art of non-violence. If you do not know how to defend yourself either way, the Government will not be able to save you in spite of its best effort. No Government, however powerful it may be, can without the active co-operation of the people. If even God only helps those who will help themselves, how much more true it must be of perishable Governments! Do not lose nerve and think that tomorrow there will be no Government and it will be all anarchy. You can be the Government now, and you certainly will be in the contingency you contemplate or you will perish."

*Harijan*, 8-6-'40, p. 157

## LEARNING WITHOUT COURAGE

(From "Awakening among Students")

Learning without courage is like a waxen statue beautiful to look at but bound to melt at the least touch of a hot substance.

*Young India*, 12-7-'28, p. 236

## V BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY

47

## BRAHMACHARYA OR CHASTITY

I

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

The third among our observances is *brahmacharya*. As a matter of fact all observances are deducible from Truth, and are meant to subserve it. The man, who is wedded to Truth and worships Truth alone, proves unfaithful to her, if he applies his talents to anything else. How then can he minister to the senses? A man, whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begetting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should, after what has been said before, appear a contradiction in terms.

If we look at it from the standpoint of Ahimsa (non-violence), we find that the fulfilment of Ahimsa is impossible without utter selflessness. Ahimsa means Universal Love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is there left for all the world besides? It simply means, "We two first, and the devil take all the rest of them." As a faithful wife must be prepared to sacrifice her all for the sake of her husband, and a faithful husband for the sake of his wife, it is clear that such persons cannot rise to



the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their love. The larger their family, the farther are they from Universal Love. Hence one who would obey the law of Ahimsa cannot marry, not to speak of gratification outside the marital bond.

Then what about people who are already married? Will they never be able to realize Truth? Can they never offer up their all at the altar of humanity? There is a way out for them. They can behave as if they were not married. Those who have enjoyed this happy condition will be able to bear me out. Many have to my knowledge successfully tried the experiment. If the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all the women in the world are his sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man and snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrelling become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrelling where the love is selfish and bounded.

If the foregoing argument is appreciated, a consideration of the physical benefits of chastity becomes a matter of secondary importance. How foolish it is intentionally to dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment! It is a grave misuse to fritter away for physical gratification that which is given to man and woman for the full development of their bodily and mental powers. Such misuse is the root cause of many a disease.

*Brahmacharya*, like all other observances, must be observed in thought, word and deed. We are told in the Gita, and experience will corroborate the statement, that the foolish man, who appears to control his body, but is nursing evil thoughts in his mind, makes a vain effort. It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray. Where the mind wanders, the body must follow sooner or later.



It is necessary here to appreciate a distinction. It is one thing to allow the mind to harbour impure thoughts; it is a different thing altogether if it strays among them in spite of ourselves. Victory will be ours in the end, if we non-co-operate with the mind in its evil wanderings.

We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control, the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control. We can do nothing more, nothing less. If we give way to the mind, the body and the mind will pull different ways, and we shall be false to ourselves. Body and mind may be said to go together, so long as we continue to resist the approach of every evil thought.

The observance of *brahmacharya* has been believed to be very difficult, almost impossible. In trying to find a reason for this belief, we see that the term *brahmacharya* has been taken in a narrow sense. Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *brahmacharya*. I feel, that this conception is incomplete and wrong. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense. He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time to expect to control the only remaining organ is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt, that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success. Perhaps the palate is the chief sinner. That is why in the Ashram we have assigned to control of the palate a separate place among our observances.

Let us remember the root meaning of *brahmacharya*. *Charya* means course of conduct; *brahma-charya* conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma*, i.e., Truth. From this

etymological meaning arises the special meaning, viz. control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

From *Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. III

## II

This observance does not give rise to ever so many problems and dilemmas as Ahimsa does. Its meaning is generally well understood, but understanding it is one thing; practising it is quite another thing and calls forth all our powers. Many of us put forth a great effort but without making any progress. Some of us even lost ground previously won. None has reached perfection. But everyone realizes its supreme importance. My striving in this direction began before 1906 when I took the vow. There were many ups and downs. It was only after I had burnt my fingers at times that I realized the deeper meaning of *brahmacharya*. And then I found that expositions made in books cannot be understood without actual experience, and wear a fresh aspect in the light of it. Even in the case of a simple machine like the spinning wheel it is one thing to read the directions for plying it, and it is another thing to put the directions into practice. New light dawns upon us as soon as we commence our practice. And what is true of simple tangible things like the wheel is still more true of spiritual states.

A *brahmachari* is one who controls his organs of sense in thought, word and deed. The meaning of this definition became somewhat clear after I had kept the observance for some time, but it is not quite clear even now, for I do not claim to be a perfect *brahmachari*, evil thoughts having been held in restraint but not eradicated. When they are eradicated, I will discover further implications of the definition.

Ordinary *brahmacharya* is not so difficult as it is supposed to be. We have made it difficult by understanding the term in a narrow sense. Many of us play with *brahmacharya* like fools who put their hands in the fire and still expect



to escape being burnt. Very few realize that a *brahmachari* has to control not one but all the organs of sense. He is no *brahmachari* who thinks that mere control of animal passion is the be-all and end-all of *brahmacharya*. No wonder if he finds it very difficult. He who attempts to control only one organ and allows all the others free play must not expect to achieve success. He might as well deliberately descend into a well and expect to keep his body dry. Those who would achieve an easy conquest of animal passion must give up all unnecessary things which stimulate it. They must control their palate and cease to read suggestive literature and to enjoy all luxuries. I have not the shadow of a doubt that they will find *brahmacharya* easy enough after such renunciation.

Some people think that it is not a breach of *brahmacharya* to cast a lascivious look at one's own or another's wife or to touch her in the same manner; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Such behaviour constitutes a direct breach of *brahmacharya* in the grosser sense of the term. Men and women who indulge in it deceive themselves and the world, and growing weaker day by day, make themselves easily susceptible to disease. If they stop short of a full satisfaction of desire, the credit for it is due to circumstances and not to themselves. They are bound to fall at the very first opportunity.

In *brahmacharya* as conceived by the Ashram those who are married behave as if they were not married. Married people do well to renounce gratification outside the marital bond; theirs is a limited *brahmacharya*. But to look upon them as *brahmacharis* is to do violence to that glorious term.

Such is the complete Ashram definition of *brahmacharya*. However there are men as well as women in the Ashram who enjoy considerable freedom in meeting one another. The ideal is that one Ashramite should have the same freedom in meeting another as is enjoyed by a son in meeting his mother or by a brother in meeting his sister. That is to say, the restrictions that are generally imposed for the protection of *brahmacharya* are lifted in the Satyagraha Ashram, where we believe that *brahmacharya* which



ever stands in need of such adventitious support is no *brahmacharya* at all. The restrictions may be necessary at first but must wither away in time. Their disappearance does not mean that a *brahmachari* goes about seeking the company of women, but it does mean that if there is an occasion for him to minister to a woman, he may not refuse such ministry under the impression that it is forbidden to him.

Woman for a *brahmachari* is not the 'door-keeper of hell' but is an incarnation of our Mother who is in Heaven. He is no *brahmachari* at all whose mind is disturbed if he happens to see a woman or if he has to touch her in order to render service. A *brahmachari's* reaction to a living image and to a bronze statue is one and the same. But a man who is perturbed at the very mention of woman and who is desirous of observing *brahmacharya*, must fly even from a figurine made of metal.

An Ashram, where men and women thus live and work together, serve one another and try to observe *brahmacharya*, is exposed to many perils. Its arrangements involve to a certain extent a deliberate imitation of life in the West. I have grave doubts about my competence to undertake such an experiment. But this applies to all my experiments. It is on account of these doubts that I do not look upon any one else as my disciple. Those who have joined the Ashram after due deliberation have joined me as co-workers, fully conscious of all the risks involved therein. As for the young boys and girls, I look upon them as my own children, and as such they are automatically drawn within the pale of my experiments. These experiments are undertaken in the name of the God of Truth. He is the Master Potter while we are mere clay in His all-powerful hands.

My experience of the Ashram so far has taught me that there is no ground for disappointment as regards the results of this pursuit of *brahmacharya* under difficulties. Men as well as women have on the whole derived benefit from it, but the greatest benefit has in my opinion accrued to women. Some of us have fallen, some have risen after sustaining a fall. The possibility of stumbling is implicit in all such experimentation. Where there is cent per cent success,

it is not an experiment but a characteristic of omniscience.

I now come to a point of vital importance which I have reserved for treatment towards the end of the discussion. We are told in the Bhagavadgita (II:59) that 'when a man starves his senses, the objects of those senses disappear from him, but not the yearning for them; the yearning too departs when he beholds the Supreme,' that is to say, the Truth or *Brahma* (God). The whole truth of the matter has here been set forth by the experienced Krishna. Fasting and all other forms of discipline are ineffective without the grace of God. What is the vision of the Truth or God? It does not mean seeing something with the physical eye or witnessing a miracle. Seeing God means realization of the fact that God abides in one's heart. The yearning must persist until one has attained this realization, and will vanish upon realization. It is with this end in view that we keep observances, and engage ourselves in spiritual endeavour at the Ashram. Realization is the final fruit of constant effort. The human lover sacrifices his all for his beloved, but his sacrifice is fruitless inasmuch as it is offered for the sake of momentary pleasure. But the quest of Truth calls for even greater concentration than that of the human beloved. There is joy ineffable in store for the aspirant at the end of the quest. Still very few of us are as earnest as even the human lover. Such being the facts of the case, what is the use of complaining that the quest of Truth is an uphill task? The human beloved may be at a distance of several thousand miles; God is there in the tabernacle of the human heart, nearer to us than the finger nails are to the fingers. But what is to be done with a man who wanders all over the wide world in search of treasure which as a matter of fact is buried under his very feet?

The *brahmacharya* observed by a self-restraining person is not something to be despised. It certainly serves to weaken the force of the yearning for the 'fleshpots of Egypt'. One may keep fasts or adopt various other methods of mortifying the flesh, but the objects of sense must be compelled to disappear. The yearning will get itself in readiness to go as this process is on. Then the seeker will have the beatific vision, and that will be the signal for the yearning to make



its final exit. The treasure supposed to be lost will be recovered. He who has not put all his strength into his effort has no right to complain that he has not 'seen' *Brahma*. Observing *brahmacharya* is one of the means to the end which is seeing *Brahma*. Without *brahmacharya* no one may expect to see Him, and without seeing Him one cannot observe *brahmacharya* to perfection. The verse therefore does not rule out self-discipline but only indicates its limitations.

All members of the Ashram, young as well as old, married as well as unmarried, try to observe *brahmacharya*, but only a few will observe it for life. When the young people come to years of discretion, they are told that they are not bound to observe *brahmacharya* any longer against their will, and that whoever feels that he is unable to put forth the requisite effort has a right to marry. And when he makes the request, the Ashram helps him in finding out a suitable partner in life. This position is very well understood, and the results have been uniformly good. The young men have persisted in larger numbers. The girls too have done pretty well. None of them married before she was fifteen, and many married only after they were nineteen.

Those who wish to marry with Ashram assistance must rest satisfied with the simplest of religious ceremonies. There are no dinners, no guests invited from outside, no beating of drums. Both bride and bridegroom are dressed in hand-spun and hand-woven Khadi. There are no ornaments in gold or silver. There is no marriage settlement and no dowry except a few clothes and a spinning wheel. The function hardly costs even ten rupees, and takes not more than one hour. The bride and bridegroom recite in their own language the *mantras* (Vedic verses) of the *Saptapadi*, the purport of which has already been explained to them. On the day fixed for the marriage, the bride and bridegroom keep a fast, water trees, clean the cowshed and the Ashram well and read the Gita before the ceremony. Those who give away the bride also fast until they have made the gift. We now insist that the Ashram will not help to arrange a marriage between members of the same



subcaste, and every one is encouraged to seek his mate outside his own subcaste.\*

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*Ashram Observances in Action*, (1959 Edn.), Chap. IV

## 48

### WHAT IS BRAHMACHARYA ?

[The following is Mahadev Desai's translation of an article I wrote on this delicate subject in the *Navajivan* of 25th May 1924. I gladly publish it in *Young India* as I have before me many letters from the other parts of India on the same subject. The stray thoughts collected together in the article might be of some help to those who are earnestly striving for a pure life. My inquirers have been all Hindus and naturally the article is addressed to them. The last paragraph is the most important and operative part. The names Allah or God carry with them the same potency. The idea is to realize the presence of God in us. All sins are committed in secrecy. The moment we realize that God witnesses even our thoughts we shall be free. —M. K. G.]

It is not easy to write on this subject. But the desire has been uppermost in my mind to share with my readers some grains out of the vast store of my experience. Some letters I have received have whetted the desire.

A friend asks:

"What is *brahmacharya*? Is it possible to practise it to perfection? If possible, do you do so?"

The full and proper meaning of *brahmacharya* is search of *Brahman*. *Brahman* pervades every being and can therefore be searched by diving into and realizing the inner self. This realization is impossible without complete control of the senses. *Brahmacharya* thus means control in thought, word and action, of all the senses at all times and in all places.

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\* This was written in 1932. In 1948 Gandhiji said a marriage could be celebrated in his presence only if one of the parties was a Harijan and the other a caste-Hindu. —V. G. D.

A man or woman completely practising *brahmacharya* is absolutely free from passion. Such a one therefore lives nigh unto God, is Godlike.

I have no doubt that it is possible to practise such *brahmacharya* in thought, word and action to the fullest extent. I am sorry to say that I have not yet reached that perfect state of *brahmacharya*, though I am every moment of my life striving to reach it. I have not given up hope of reaching that state in this very body. I have gained control over the body. I can be master of myself during my waking hours. I have fairly succeeded in learning to control my tongue. But I have yet to cover many stages in the control of my thoughts. They do not come and go at my bidding. My mind is thus constantly in a state of insurrection against itself.

In my waking moments, however, I can stop my thoughts from colliding with one another. I may say that in the waking state the mind is secure against the approach of evil thoughts. But in the hours of sleep, control over the thoughts is much less. When asleep, the mind would be swayed by all sorts of thoughts, by unexpected dreams, and by desire for things done and enjoyed by the flesh before. Such thoughts or dreams when unclean are followed by the usual consequences. Whilst such experiences are possible a person cannot be said to be free from all passion. The deviation is, however, diminishing, but has not yet ceased. If I had complete mastery over my thoughts I should not have suffered from the diseases of pleurisy, dysentery and appendicitis that I did during the last ten years. I believe that a healthy soul should inhabit a healthy body. To the extent, therefore, that the soul grows into health and freedom from passion, to that extent the body also grows into that state. This does not mean that a healthy body should be necessarily strong in flesh. A brave soul often inhabits a lean body. After a certain stage the flesh diminishes in proportion to the growth of the soul. A perfectly healthy body may be very fleshless. A muscular body is often heir to many an ill. Even if it is apparently free from disease, it is not immune from infections, contagions and the like. A perfectly healthy body, on the contrary,



is proof against all these. Incorruptible blood has the inherent virtue of resisting all infections.

Such an equipoise is indeed difficult of attainment. Otherwise I should have reached it, because my soul is witness to the fact that I would spare no pains to attain to this perfect state. No outward obstacle can stand between me and that state. But it is not easy for all, at least for me, to efface past *samskaras*. But the delay has not in the least dismayed me. For I have a mental picture of that perfect state. I have even dim glimpses of it. The progress achieved fills me with hope, rather than despair. But even if I depart from this body before the hope is fulfilled, I would not think that I had failed. For I believe in rebirth as much as I believe in the existence of my present body. I, therefore, know that even a little effort is not wasted.

I have said so much about myself for the simple reason that my correspondents and others like them may have patience and self-confidence. The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are therefore the same for every one. With some, it has manifested itself, with others it has yet to do so. Patient striving would carry everyone through and to the same experience.

I have, therefore, discussed *brahmacharya* in its wider meaning. The ordinary accepted sense of *brahmacharya* is the control in thought, word and action of animal passion. And it is quite proper thus to restrict its meaning. It has been thought very difficult to practise this *brahmacharya*. This control of the carnal desire has been so very difficult, has become nearly impossible, because equal stress has not been laid on the control of the palate. It is also the experience of our physicians that a body enfeebled by disease is always a favourite abode of carnal desire, and *brahmacharya* by an enfeebled race is difficult to practise naturally.

I have talked above of a lean but healthy body. Let no one understand me to have deprecated physical culture. I have talked of *brahmacharya* in its perfect aspect in my very crude language. It is likely therefore to be misunderstood. But one who would practise complete control of all



the senses must needs welcome the waning of the flesh. With the extinction of attachment to the flesh, comes the extinction of the desire to have muscular strength.

But the body of a true *brahmachari* is bound to be exceptionally fresh and wiry. This *brahmacharya* is something unearthly. He who is not swayed by carnal desire even in his sleep is worthy of all adoration. The control of every other sense shall be 'added unto' him.

With reference to this restricted *brahmacharya*, another friend writes:

"I am miserable. I am haunted by carnal thoughts even whilst I am in my office, on the road, by night and day, whilst reading and working, even whilst I am praying. How is a wandering mind to be controlled? How is one to learn to look upon every woman as one's mother? How is the eye to radiate forth purest love? How can evil thoughts be eradicated? I have before me your article on *brahmacharya*, (written years ago) but it has failed to help me."

This condition is heart-rending. Many suffer from it. But so long as the mind is engaged in a perpetual struggle against evil thoughts, there is no reason to despair. When the eye offends, it should be closed. When the ears offend, they should be stopped. It is best always to walk with downcast eyes. They will then have no occasion to go astray. All haunts of filthy talk or unclean music should be avoided. There should be full control of the palate. I know that he who has not mastered his palate cannot master the carnal desire. It is very difficult I know to master the palate. But mastery of the palate means automatic mastery of the other sense. One of the rules for control of the palate is to abjure completely or, as much as possible, all condiments. A more difficult rule is to cultivate the feeling that the food we eat is to sustain the body, never to satisfy the palate. We take air not for the pleasure of it but to breathe. We drink water to quench our thirst; and so should we take food to satisfy our hunger. But from childhood upwards we are brought up to a different habit. Our parents make us cultivate all sorts of tastes, not with a view to our nourishment, but for indulging their affection for us. We thus get spoiled. We have therefore to struggle against the results of our own upbringing.

There is however a golden rule for gaining control of the carnal desire. It is the repetition of the divine word 'Rama' or such other *mantra*. The *Dwadash Mantra*\* also serves the same purpose. Every one must select the *mantra* after his heart. I have suggested the word 'Rama' because I was brought up to repeat it in my childhood and I have ever got strength and sustenance out of it. Whichever *mantra* is selected, one should be identified with it whilst repeating it. I have not the least doubt of ultimate success as a result of repetition of some such *mantra* in complete faith, even though other thoughts distract the mind. The *mantra* will be the light of one's life and will keep one from all distress. Such holy *mantras* should obviously never be used for material ends. If their use is strictly restricted to the preservation of morals, the results attained will be startling. Of course a mere repetition of such a *mantra* parrot-wise would be of no avail. One should throw his whole soul into it. The parrot repeats it like a machine. We should repeat it with a view to preventing the approach of unwelcome thoughts and with full faith in the efficacy of the *mantra* to that end.

*Young India*, 5-6-'24, p. 186

## 49

### SELF-CONTROL

(Foreword to the second edition of *Self-restraint v. Self-indulgence* by Gandhiji)

That the first edition was sold out practically within a week of its publication is a matter of joy to me. The correspondence that the series of articles collected in this volume has given rise to shows the need of such a publication. May those who have not made self-indulgence a religion, but who are struggling to regain lost self-control, which should under normal conditions be our natural state, find some help from a perusal of these pages. For their guidance the following instructions may prove useful:

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\* ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।



1. Remember if you are married that your wife is your friend, companion and co-worker, not an instrument of sexual enjoyment.

2. Self-control is the law of your being. Therefore the sexual act can be performed only when both desire it and that too subject to rules which in their lucidity both may have agreed upon.

3. If you are unmarried you owe it to yourself, to society and to your future partner to keep yourself pure. If you cultivate this sense of loyalty, you will find it as an infallible protection against all temptation.

4. Think always of that unseen Power which though we may never see we all feel within us as watching and noting every impure thought and you will find that Power ever helping you.

5. Laws governing a life of self-restraint must be necessarily different from a life of self-indulgence. Therefore, you will regulate your society, your reading, your haunts of recreation and your food.

You will seek the society of the good and the pure.

You will resolutely refrain from reading passion-breeding novels and magazines and read the works that sustain humanity. You will make one book your constant companion for reference and guidance.

You will avoid theatres and cinemas. Recreation is where you may not dissipate yourself. You will, therefore, attend *bhajan-mandalis* where the word and the tune uplift the soul.

You will eat not to satisfy your palate but your hunger. A self-indulgent man lives to eat; a self-restrained man eats to live. Therefore, you will abstain from all irritating condiments, alcohol which excites the nerves, and narcotics which deaden the sense of right and wrong. You will regulate the quantity and time of your meals.

6. When your passions threaten to get the better of you go down on your knees and cry out to God for help. *Ramanama* is my infallible help. As extraneous aid take a hip-bath, i.e. sit in a tub full of cold water with your legs out of it, and you will find your passions have immediately



cooled. Sit in it for a few minutes unless you are weak and there is danger of a chill.

7. Take brisk walking exercise in the open air early in the morning and at night before going to bed.

8. 'Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise', is a sound proverb. 9 o'clock to bed and 4 o'clock to rise is a good rule. Go to bed on an empty stomach. Therefore your last meal must not be after 6 p.m.

9. Remember that man is a representative of God to serve all that lives and thus to express God's dignity and love. Let service be your sole joy and you will need no other enjoyment in life.

*Young India*, 24-3-'27, p. 92

## 50

### SELF-CONTROL V. ARTIFICIAL-CONTROL

(Swami Yoganand, asked Gandhiji "Do you prefer self-control to birth-control?" Gandhiji's answer to the question and the conversation that ensued between the two is reproduced below from "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

"I think artificial birth-control or birth-control according to methods suggested today and recommended in the West is suicidal. When I say 'suicidal', I do not mean resulting in the extinction of the race, I mean suicidal in a higher sense of the term, that is to say these methods make man lower than the brute; they are immoral."

"But how long are we to tolerate indiscriminate procreation? I know a man who used to purchase a *seer* of milk, and went on diluting it with water in order to divide it between his children whose number increased every year. Don't you think this was a sin?"

"It is a sin to bring forth unwanted children, but I think it is a greater sin to avoid the consequences of one's own action. It simply unmans man."

"What then is the most practical method of telling man this truth?"

“The most practical method is to live the life of self-control. Example is better than precept.”

“But the West asks us, ‘Why is it that you have greater child mortality and lower life average than we, though you regard yourselves as more spiritual than the West?’ Do you believe in many children, Mahatmaji?”

“I believe in no children.”

“Then the whole race will be extinct.”

“It won’t be extinct, it will be transformed into something better. But it can never happen, for we have inherited from eternity the sex instinct from our progenitors. It means a tremendous effort to check this habit of ages, and yet it is a simple effort. Absolute renunciation, absolute *brahmacharya* is the ideal state. If you dare not think of it marry by all means, but even then live a life of self-control.”

“Have you any working method to teach this to the masses?”

“It is, as I said a moment ago, to attain complete self-control and go and live that life amongst the masses. A life of self-restraint and denial of all luxuries cannot but have its effect on the masses. There is an indissoluble connection between self-control and the control of the palate. The man who observes *brahmacharya* will be controlled in every one of his acts and will be humble.”

“I see what you mean,” said the Swami. “The masses do not know the happiness of self-control and we have to teach them that. But what about the argument of the West I referred to before?”

“I do not think that we are more spiritually-minded than the West. If we were, we should not have fallen so low. But because the average life of a Westerner is much higher than ours, it does not prove the spirituality of the West. Whoever is spiritually-minded must show a better, not necessarily a longer, life.”

*Harijan*, 7-9-'35, p. 233 at p. 234



## MARRIED BRAHMACHARYA

(Translated from *Harijansevak* by Pyarelal)

A friend writes:

"I have long since held with you that self-control is the only sovereign method for attaining birth-control. That the sexual act is meant for procreation only, and apart from it, in any shape or form, would amount to unnatural gratification of lust, needs no proof. But sometimes this brings one up against a grave dilemma. Supposing that the sexual act, once or twice, fails to lead to conception, what is one to do then? Where is one to draw the limit? It is hard finally to give up all hope of begetting offspring. On the other hand, unlimited indulgence in the sexual act must result in the man being drained of all vitality. Again, should such a person be told to regard his failure to beget progeny on the first or the second chance, as a mark of adverse fate and on that score to abstain from having any further intercourse thereafter? But that would require an exceptional degree of self-possession and spiritual strength on the part of the person concerned. Instances of people begetting progeny in their declining years after repeated failure during the years of manhood and youth, are by no means either unknown or rare. That makes the observance of complete abstinence still more difficult, and the position becomes further complicated when the parties happen to be otherwise healthy and free from any physical defect."

I admit the difficulty, but the difficulty is inherent in the problem itself. The road to any progress is strewn with such difficulty, and the story of man's ascent in the scale of evolution is co-extensive with the history of the successful overcoming of these difficulties. Take the story of the attempts to conquer the Himalayas. The higher you go the steeper becomes the climb, the more difficult the ascent, so much so that its highest peak still remains unvanquished. The enterprise has already exacted a heavy toll of sacrifice. Yet every year sees fresh attempts made only to end in failure like their predecessors. All that has, however, failed to damp the spirit of the explorers. If that



is the case with the conquest of the Himalayas, what about the conquest of self, which is a harder job by far, even as the reward is richer? The scaling of the Himalayas can, at best, give a temporary feeling of elation and triumph. But the reward of the conquest of self is a spiritual bliss that knows no waning and grows ever more and more. It is a well-known maxim of the science of *brahmacharya* that in-semination in the case of a man who has properly kept the rules of *brahmacharya*, cannot, ought not to, fail to lead to conception. And this is just as it should be. When a man has completely conquered his animality, involuntary continence becomes impossible, and the desire for sexual gratification for its own sake ceases altogether. Sexual union then takes place only when there is a desire for offspring. This is the meaning of what has been described as 'Married *Brahmacharya*'. In other words, a person who obeys this rule though leading a married life attains the same state as and is equal in merit to one who completely abstains from the sexual act, which is only a means for procreation never for self-indulgence. In practice, it is true, this ideal is seen to be rarely realized in its completeness. But in shaping our ideals we cannot think in terms of our weaknesses or the possible lapses. The present tendency, however, is to take a complete swing round, and the protagonists of contraceptives have almost set up self-indulgence as their ideal. Self-indulgence obviously can never be an ideal. There can be no limit to the practice of an ideal. But unlimited self-indulgence, as everybody would admit, can only result in certain destruction of the individual or the race concerned. Hence self-control alone can be our ideal, and it has been so regarded from the earliest times. Therefore we have to explore the means of its attainment, not to circumvent it.

It has become my settled conviction that most of the difficulties that are experienced in connection with the practice of *brahmacharya* are due to our ignorance about its laws and would of themselves disappear if we discovered them. Let us, for instance, examine the poser propounded by our correspondent in the ideal light. In the ideal state, in the first place, such a contingency will never arise,

because in a normally healthy couple, who have from their childhood upward observed the rules of *brahmacharya*, sexual union can never prove infertile. In practice, however, anomalies do arise. The only rule that can be laid down in such instances is that the coitus may be permitted once at the end of the monthly period till conception is established.\* If its object is achieved it must be abjured forthwith, for mere sexual gratification should never be its object. It is my faith based on my experience that bodily and mental health increases in the same ratio as bodily and mental chastity. Nor is it to be wondered at. A substance which is capable of producing such a wonderful being as man cannot but, when properly conserved, be transmuted into matchless energy and strength. Anyone can test for himself the truth of this observation of the Shastras for himself by personal experience. And the rule holds good in respect of woman no less than man. The real difficulty, however, is that we vainly expect to be free from outward manifestations of lust, while harbouring it in our minds, with the result that physically and mentally we become utter wrecks, and our lives, in the words of the Gita, become a living lie or hypocrisy personified.

*Harijan*, 20-3-'37, p. 44

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\* The most illustrious example of this in European history is perhaps afforded by Ezenobia, the queen of Palmyra, equally renowned for her beauty and valour about whom Gibbon has observed: "She never admitted her husband's embraces but for the sake of posterity. If her hopes were baffled, in the ensuing month she reiterated the experiment." — P.



## ATTAINMENT OF TRUE BRAHMACHARYA

(From "How Non-violence Works")

*Brahmacharya*...does not mean mere physical self-control. It means much more. It means complete control over all the senses. Thus an impure thought is a breach of *brahmacharya*, so is anger. All power comes from the preservation and sublimation of the vitality that is responsible for creation of life. If the vitality is husbanded instead of being dissipated, it is transmuted into creative energy of the highest order. This vitality is continuously and even unconsciously dissipated by evil, or even rambling, disorderly, unwanted thoughts. And since thought is the root of all speech and action, the quality of the latter corresponds to that of the former. Hence perfectly controlled thought is itself power of the highest potency and can become self-acting. That seems to me to be the meaning of the silent prayer of the heart. If a man is after the image of God, He has but to will a thing in the limited sphere allotted to him and it becomes. Such power is impossible in one who dissipates his energy in any way whatsoever, even as steam kept in a leaky pipe yields no power. The sexual act divorced from the deliberate purpose of generation is a typical and gross form of dissipation and has therefore been specially and rightly chosen for condemnation. But in any one who has to organize vast masses of mankind for non-violent action the full control described by me has to be attempted and virtually achieved.

This control is unattainable save by the grace of God. There is a verse in the second chapter of the Gita which freely rendered means: "Sense effects remain in abeyance whilst one is fasting or whilst the particular sense is starved, but the hankering does not cease except when one sees God face to face." This control is not mechanical or temporary. Once attained it is never lost. In that state vital energy is stored up without any chance of escaping by the innumerable outlets.



It has been said that such *brahmacharya*, if it is at all attainable, can be so only by cave-dwellers. A *brahmachari*, it is said, should never see, much less touch, a woman. Doubtless a *brahmachari* may not think of, speak of, see or touch a woman lustfully. But the prohibition one finds in books on *brahmacharya* is mentioned without the important adverb. The reason for the omission seems to be that man is no impartial judge in such matters, and therefore cannot say when he is or is not affected by such contacts. Cupid's visitations are often unperceivable. Difficult though therefore *brahmacharya* is of observance when one freely mixes with the world, it is not of much value, if it is attainable only by retirement from the world.

Anyway, I have practised *brahmacharya* for over thirty years with considerable success though living in the midst of activities. After the decision to lead the life of a *brahmachari* there was little change in my outward practice, except with my wife. In the course of my work among the Indians in South Africa, I mixed freely with women. There was hardly an Indian woman in the Transvaal and Natal whom I did not know. They were so many sisters and daughters to me. My *brahmacharya* was not derived from books. I evolved my own rules for my guidance and that of those who, at my invitation, had joined me in the experiment. If I have not followed the prescribed restrictions, much less have I accepted the description found even in religious literature of woman as the source of all evil and temptation. Owing as I do all the good there may be in me to my mother, I have looked upon woman, never as an object for satisfaction of sexual desire, but always with the veneration due to my own mother. Man is the tempter and aggressor. It is not woman whose touch defiles man but he is often himself too impure to touch her. But recently a doubt has seized me as to the nature of the limitations that a *brahmachari* or *brahmacharini* should put upon himself or herself regarding contacts with the opposite sex. I have set limitations which do not satisfy me. What they should be I do not know. I am experimenting. I have never claimed to have been a perfect *brahmachari* of my definition. I have not acquired that control over my thoughts that I need for my researches

in non-violence. If my non-violence is to be contagious and infectious, I must acquire greater control over my thoughts.

*Harijan*, 23-7-'38, p. 192

## 53

EXAGGERATION AND UNDER-ESTIMATION  
OF VALUES

(Originally appeared under the title "How Did I Begin It?"  
— translated from the original in Gujarati)

Readers must have noticed that last week I started writing for the *Harijan*. How long I shall be able to continue it, I do not know. God's will be done in this as in other things.

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The question that is foremost with us all, I discuss every evening after prayer. This writing will come before the readers after seven days. This interval would be considered too long in connection with the pressing problem. Therefore, in these columns for the moment, I must confine myself to things of eternal value. One such is *brahmacharya*. The world seems to be running after things of transitory value. It has no time for the other. And yet when one thinks a little deeper it becomes clear that it is the things eternal that count in the end.

What is *brahmacharya* ? It is the way of life that leads us to *Brahma* (God). It includes full control over the process of reproduction. The control must be in thought, word and deed. If the thought is not under control, the other two have no value. There is a saying in Hindustani: "He whose heart is pure has the all purifying waters of Ganges in his house." For one whose thought is under control, the other is mere child's play. The *brahmachari* of my conception will be healthy and will easily live long. He will not even suffer from so much as a headache. Mental and physical work will not cause fatigue. He is ever bright, never slothful. Outward neatness will be an exact reflection of the inner. He will exhibit all the attributes of the steadfast one



described in the Gita. It need cause no worry if not one person is met with answering the description.

Is it strange that one who is able completely to conserve and sublimate the vital fluid which has the potentiality of creating human beings, should exhibit all the attributes described above? Who can measure the creative strength of such sublimation, one drop of which has the potentiality of bringing into being a human life? Patanjali has described five disciplines. It is not possible to isolate any one of these and practise it. It may be posited in the case of Truth, because it really includes the other four. And for this age the five have been expanded into eleven. Acharya Vinoba has put them in the form of a Marathi verse: They are non-violence, truth, non-stealing, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, bread labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal regard for all religions, Swadeshi and removal of untouchability.

All these can be derived from Truth. But life is complex. It is not possible to enunciate one grand principle and leave the rest to follow of itself. Even when we know a proposition, its corollaries have to be worked out.

It is well to bear in mind that all the disciplines are of equal importance. If one is broken all are. There seems to be a popular belief amongst us that breach of truth or non-violence is pardonable. Non-stealing and non-possession are rarely mentioned. We hardly recognize the necessity of observing them. But a fancied breach of *brahmacharya* excites wrath and worse. There must be something seriously wrong with a society in which values are exaggerated and underestimated. Moreover to use the word *brahmacharya* in a narrow sense is to detract from its value. Such detraction increases the difficulty of proper observance. When it is isolated even the elementary observance becomes difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it is essential that all the disciplines should be taken as one. This enables one to realize the full meaning and significance of *brahmacharya*.

*Harijan*, 8-6-'47, p. 180



## WALLS OF PROTECTION

(From the original in Gujarati)

Let us ask ourselves what walls should be erected to protect *brahmacharya* of which I wrote last week. The answer seems clear. It is not *brahmacharya* that needs walls of protection. To say this is easy enough and sounds sweet. But it is difficult to understand the import of the statement and more so to act accordingly.

It is true that he who has attained perfect *brahmacharya* does not stand in need of protecting walls. But the aspirant undoubtedly needs them, even as a young mango plant has need of a strong fence round it. A child goes from its mother's lap to the cradle and from cradle to the push-cart till he becomes a man who has learnt to walk without aid. To cling to the aid when it is needless is surely harmful.

I made it clear last week that *brahmacharya* is one out of the eleven observances. It follows, therefore, that the real aid to *brahmacharya* are the remaining ten observances. The difference between them and the walls of protection is that the latter are temporary, the former permanent. They are an integral part of *brahmacharya*.

*Brahmacharya* is a mental condition. The outward behaviour of a man is at once the sign and proof of the inner state. He who has killed the sexual urge in him will never be guilty of it in any shape or form. However attractive a woman may be, her attraction will produce no effect on the man without the urge. The same rule applies to woman. But he or she who has not conquered lust should not turn the eyes even towards a sister or a brother or a daughter or a son. This advice I have given to friends who have profited by it.

As for myself I have to admit with great shame that while the sight of women had ceased to rouse any sexual urge in me in South Africa, in the early days of my return to India past recollections roused the urge against which I

had to battle fairly hard. The same is true of the vague fear which is so unbecoming in man.

I was cowardly by nature. I was frightened to sleep in the dark. To sleep alone in a room was an act of bravery for me. I hope I have lost that cowardliness. Yet I do not know what would be my state if I lost my way and had to wander alone in a thick forest on a dark night and if I were to forget that God was ever with me. If this childhood's fear has not completely gone from me, it would be certainly more difficult for me to be fearless in a lonely jungle than to control the sex urge.

There are certain rules laid down in India for the would-be *brahmachari*. Thus he may not live among women, animals and eunuchs, he may not teach a woman only or even group, he may not sit on the same mat as a woman, he may not look at any part of a woman's body, he may not take milk, curds, ghee or any fatty substance nor indulge in baths and oily massage. I read about these when I was in South Africa. There I came in touch with some men and women who, while they observed *brahmacharya*, never knew that any of the above-named restraints were necessary. Nor did I observe them and I was none the worse for the non-observance. I did give up milk, ghee and other animal substances but for different reasons. I failed in this attempt after two or three years after my return to India. But if today I could find any effective vegetable substitute for milk and ghee, I would gladly renounce all animal products. But this is another story.

A perfect *brahmachari* never loses his vital fluid. On the contrary he is able to increase it day by day and, what is more, he conserves it; he will, therefore, never become old in the accepted sense and his intellect will never be dimmed.

It appears to me that even the true aspirant does not need the above-mentioned restraints. *Brahmacharya* is not a virtue that can be cultivated by outward restraints. He who runs away from a necessary contact with a woman does not understand the full meaning of *brahmacharya*.

Let not the reader imagine for one moment that what I have written is to serve as the slightest encouragement to



life without the law of real restraint. Nor is there room in any honest attempt for hypocrisy.

Self-indulgence and hypocrisy are sins to be avoided.

The true *brahmachari* will shun false restraints. He must create his own fences according to his limitations, breaking them down when he feels that they are unnecessary. The first thing is to know what true *brahmacharya* is, then to realize its value and lastly to try to cultivate this priceless virtue. I hold that true service of the country demands this observance.

*Harijan*, 15-6-'47, p. 192

## IN DEFENCE

(Translated from the original in Gujarati)

The correspondent from whose letter I had quoted the other day writes:

“I entirely agree with the opinion you have expressed on the views set forth in a letter I wrote eleven years ago. Nevertheless, I lacked the courage to act up to them. I often say to myself, ‘Why enter the black hole at all?’ In spite of your presenting society with the ideal man of your imagination for its own good, it seems to me that that good would be better served by keeping intact the restraints handed down by men of experience. It is true that sex-consciousness should be removed. It is also true that the feeling of ownership of women should likewise go. But in propagating these fundamental rules, persons have been known to have damaged our society to a great extent. It seems to me to be dangerous. X objects even to sitting on the same mat with women. He may be an example of faith in our old wisdom. Nevertheless, the idea is not to be lightly set aside. The sage advice of the Gita that whatever the great in a society do, common people will follow, is unforgettable. Therefore, it seems to me that it is wisdom for those who have reached a higher state to act in accordance with the capacity of those many who belong to a lower state and this they will do in order to avoid the risk of the lower state people resorting to thoughtless imitation. I admit, however, one apt argument in defence of your position, viz., that if there was nobody to demonstrate the



feasibility of the higher state, society would never develop faith in that state. Therefore, someone has got to demonstrate the feasibility of reaching the high state. I seem to reach the conclusion that every great person has got to model his behaviour after due appreciation of the *pros* and *cons*."

I like the above criticism. Everyone should learn how to measure his own weakness. He, who, knowing his own weakness, imitates the strong, is bound to fail. Hence have I contended that everyone should construct his own restraints.

I do not think X goes so far as to object to squatting on the same mat as women. I should be surprised if your statement proved true. I could not appreciate such prohibition. I have never known him to defend it.

I can only detect ignorance in likening woman to the black hole. The very thought is insulting to both man and woman. May not her son sit side by side with his mother or the man share the same bench in a train with his sister? He who suffers excitement through such juxtaposition is surely worthy of pity.

Although I believe that for the sake of social good one should abandon many things, I feel that there is room for wise discretion even in the observance of such restraints. In Europe there is a society of men which advocates stark nakedness. I was asked to join that society and I refused to do so. My objection was that the proposition was intolerable and that unless a measure of self-control had become an established fact, the exhibition of nakedness was not desirable. This I said although I believe that theoretically speaking there is nothing harmful in both the sexes going about in utter nakedness. It is said that in their state of innocence Adam and Eve had not even a fig leaf to cover their nakedness. But immediately they became aware of their nakedness, they began to cover themselves and were hurled from Paradise. Are we not in that inherited fallen state? If we were to forget that, we would surely harm ourselves. I consider this an instance of observing prohibition for the sake of social good.

Contrarywise, for the very sake of society it was just and proper to give up untouchability although it was

fashionable among people of accepted merit. Marriage of nine-year old girls used to be defended on the ground of social good. So was prohibition against crossing the seas. Such instances can be multiplied. Every custom has to be examined on its own merits.

Restraints must not be such as to perpetuate sex-consciousness. In most of our daily transactions such consciousness is absent. Such occasion, so far as I am aware, is only one. If the consciousness afflicted us the whole day long, we should be considered to have a corrupt mind and such a mind is not conducive to social welfare. If the villagers were continuously sex-conscious, they would be useless for advancement of self and society.

*Harijan*, 27-7-'47, p. 252

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## A PERPLEXITY

(Translated from the original in Gujarati)

“I have developed a curious mentality about the relations between men and women. I believe in certain checks upon these. Yet my condition is very like that of a man suspended in mid-air. I often feel that if these relations were more natural than they are, probably there would be less sinfulness. Yet something within me tells me that every touch, be it ever so superficial, is bound to lead to the eruption of animal passion. When one examines the court cases here even about brother and sister or even father and daughter, the beginning seems to have been quite innocent. In my opinion the glow of mere touch drags down inside of a month, even a week, one who is not endowed with extra purity. A good man may take even ten years but he is sure to go down the incline of vice. There is a constant conflict between the habit which we have inherited and the study of modernist books. The question often arises — can society altogether abjure contact between the sexes? I have not been able to come to a decision. Such in short is my sorry plight.”

This is the usual state of many youths and young women. There is only one way for such young people. They have to avoid all contact of the opposite sex. The checks



and restraints described in our books were the result of experience gained during those times. They were, no doubt, necessary for the writers and their readers. Today every aspirant has to pick out from them the necessary items and add new ones which experience may make necessary. If we draw a circle round the goal to be reached, we shall find many ways leading to the goal, each one according to his needs.

An aspirant who may not know his own mind will certainly fail if he blindly copies another.

Having said so much by way of caution, I must add that to find the true way to *brahmacharya* through a study of court cases and erotic literature is as fruitless as the effort to find the proverbial flower in the heavens above. The true way is not to be found in English law-courts or in the novels. They have their use in the limited field, but they are of no use to the aspirant after *brahmacharya*. English men and women who tread the difficult path are not afflicted by the imaginings of the correspondent quoted above. Those whom I have in mind have their God enthroned in their hearts. They are neither self-deceived nor would they deceive others. To them their sisters and mothers are ever thus and for them all women are in the place of sisters and mothers. It never occurs to them that every contact with them is sinful or that it is fraught with danger. They see in all women the same God they see in themselves. It will betray lack of humility to say that such specimens do not exist because we have not come across them. Lack of belief in the possibility would also amount to lowering the standards of *brahmacharya*. There is as much error in saying that there is no God because we have not seen Him face to face or because we have not met men who have had that experience, as there is in rejecting the possibilities of *brahmacharya* because our own evidence is to the contrary.

*Harijan*, 6-7-'47, p. 220



## MY LIFE

The following from its Allahabad correspondent appears in *The Bombay Chronicle*:

“Startling revelations have come to light regarding what has been going round the House of Commons about Gandhiji. It is reported that Mr. Edward Thompson, the British historian who visited Allahabad recently, threw some light on the curious mentality prevailing in England. Mr. Thompson, who met some political leaders here, is reported to have told them three things going round the House of Commons regarding Gandhiji:

\* \* \*

3. There were various stories about Gandhiji’s sensual life, it being the impression that Gandhiji had ceased to be a saint.

“Impressions about Gandhiji’s ‘sensual life’, it appeared to Mr. Thompson, were based on some Marathi papers. He spoke about them, I understand, to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, who repudiated them. He spoke about them to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. P. N. Sapru also, who strongly repudiated them.

“It appears Mr. Thompson, before leaving England, had seen several members of the House of Commons. Mr. Thompson, before leaving Allahabad, sent a letter to Mr. Greenwood, M. P. on the suggestion of Pandit Nehru pointing out that the stories regarding Gandhiji were absolutely baseless.”

Mr. Thompson was good enough to visit Segaon. He confirmed the report as substantially correct.

\* \* \*

The third charge needs clearing. Two days ago I received a letter signed by four or five Gujaratis sending me a newspaper whose one mission seems to be to paint me as black as it is possible for any person to be painted. According to its head-line it is a paper devoted to ‘the organization of Hindus’. The charges against me are mostly taken from my confessions and distorted from their setting. Among many other charges, the charge of sensuality is most marked. My *brahmacharya* is said to be a cloak to

hide my sensuality. Poor Dr. Sushila Nayar has been dragged before the public gaze for the crime of giving me massage and medicated baths, the two things for which she is the best qualified among those who surround me. The curious may be informed that there is no privacy about these operations which take over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours and during which I also transact business with Mahadev, Pyarelal or other co-workers.

The charges, to my knowledge, began with my active campaign against untouchability. This was when it was included in the Congress programme and I began to address crowds on the subject and insisted on having Harijans at meetings and in the Ashram. It was then that some Sana-tanists, who used to help me and befriend me, broke with me and began a campaign of vilification. Later, a very high-placed Englishman joined the chorus. He picked out my freedom with women and showed up my 'saintliness' as sinfulness. In this chorus there were also one or two well-known Indians. During the Round Table Conference American journals indulged in cruel caricatures of me. Mirabai who used to look after me was the target of their attack. As far as I could understand Mr. Thompson, who knows the gentlemen who have been behind these charges, my letters to Premabehn Kantak, who is a member of the Sabarmati Ashram, have also been used to prove my depravity. She is a graduate and worker of proved merit. She used to ask questions relating to *brahmacharya* and other topics. I sent her full replies. She thought they might be of general use and she published them with my permission. I hold them to be absolutely innocent and pure.

Hitherto I have ignored these charges. But Mr. Thompson's talks about them and the importunity of the Gujarati correspondents, who say the indictment sent by them is but a sample of what is being said about me, impel me to repudiate them. I have no secrets of my own in this life. I have owned my weaknesses. If I were sensually inclined, I would have the courage to make the confession. It was when I developed detestation of sensual connection even with my own wife and had sufficiently tested myself that I took the vow of *brahmacharya* in 1906, and that for the sake of better dedication to the service of the country.



From that day began my open life. I do not remember having ever slept or remained with my own wife or other women with closed doors except for the occasions referred to in my writings in *Young India* and *Navajivan*. Those were black nights with me. But as I have said repeatedly God has saved me in spite of myself. I claim no credit for any virtue that I may possess. He is for me the Giver of all good and has saved me for His service.

From that day when I began *brahmacharya*, our freedom began. My wife became a free woman, free from my authority as her lord and master, and I became free from my slavery to my own appetite which she had to satisfy. No other woman had any attraction for me in the same sense that my wife had. I was too loyal to her as husband and too loyal to the vow I had taken before my mother to be slave to any other woman. But the manner in which my *brahmacharya* came to me irresistibly drew me to woman as the mother of man. She became too sacred for sexual love. And so every woman at once became sister or daughter to me. I had enough women about me at Phoenix. Several of them were my own relations whom I had enticed to South Africa. Others were co-workers' wives or relatives. Among these were the Wests and other Englishmen. The Wests included West, his sister, his wife, and his mother-in-law who had become the Granny of the little settlement.

As has been my wont, I could not keep the new good thing to myself. So I presented *brahmacharya* for acceptance of all the settlers. All approved of it. And some took it up and remained true to the ideal. My *brahmacharya* knew nothing of the orthodox laws governing its observance. I framed my own rules as occasions necessitated. But I have never believed that all contact with woman was to be shunned for the due observance of *brahmacharya*. That restraint which demands abstention from all contact, no matter how innocent, with the opposite sex is a forced growth, having little or no vital value. Therefore natural contacts for service were never restrained. And I found myself enjoying the confidences of many sisters, European and Indian, in South Africa. And when I invited the Indian sisters in South Africa to join the civil resistance movement,



I found myself one of them. I discovered that I was specially fitted to serve womankind. To cut the (for me enthralling) story short, my return to India found me in no time one with India's women. The easy access I had to their hearts was an agreeable revelation to me. Muslim sisters never kept purdah before me here even as they did not in South Africa. I sleep in the Ashram surrounded by women for they feel safe with me in every respect. It should be remembered that there is no privacy in the Segaoon Ashram.

If I were sexually attracted towards women, I have courage enough, even at this time of life, to become a polygamist. I do not believe in free love — secret or open. Free open love I have looked upon as dog's love. Secret love is besides cowardly.

Sanatanist Hindus may abhor my non-violence. I know many of them think that Hindus will become cowards if they remain under my influence. I know of no man having become a coward under my influence. They may decry my non-violence as much as they like. But they ill serve themselves or Hinduism by indulging in palpable lies.

*Harijan*, 4-11-'39, p. 325

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### NOTHING WITHOUT GRACE

(A paragraph from the above article is reproduced herein below)

I have been trying to follow *brahmacharya* consciously and deliberately since 1899. My definition of it is purity not merely of body but of both speech and thought also. With the exception of what must be regarded as one lapse, I can recall no instance during more than thirty-six years' constant and conscious effort, of mental disturbance such as I experienced during this illness. I was disgusted with myself. The moment the feeling came I acquainted my attendants and the medical friends with my condition. They could give me no help. I expected none. I broke loose after the experience from the rigid rest that was imposed upon me. The confession of the wretched

experience brought much relief to me. I felt as if a great load had been raised from over me. It enabled me to pull myself together before any harm could be done. But what of the Gita? Its teaching is clear and precise. A mind that is once hooked to the Star of stars becomes incorruptible. How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God my much vaunted Mahatmaship has never fooled me. But this enforced rest has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them, as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of Gita is as bright as ever. Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same Gita says without any equivocation that the experience is not to be had without divine grace. We should develop swelled heads if Divinity had not made that ample reservation.

*Harijan*, 29-2-'36, p. 20

## VI CONTROL OF THE PALATE

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### CONTROL OF THE PALATE

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

Control of the palate is very closely connected with the observance of *brahmacharya*. I have found from experience that the observance of celibacy becomes comparatively easy, if one acquires mastery over the palate. This does not figure among the observances of time-honoured recognition. Could it be because even great sages found it difficult to achieve? In the Satyagraha Ashram we have elevated it to the rank of an independent observance, and must therefore consider it by itself.

Food has to be taken as we take medicine, that is, without thinking whether it is palatable or otherwise, and only in quantities limited to the needs of the body. Just as medicine taken in too small a dose does not take effect or the



full effect, and as too large a dose injures the system, so it is with food. It is therefore a breach of this observance to take anything just for its pleasant taste. It is equally a breach to take too much of what one finds to one's taste. From this it follows, that to put salt in one's food, in order to increase or modify its flavour or in order to cure its insipidity, is a breach of the observance. But the addition is not a breach, if it is considered necessary for health to have a certain proportion of salt with food. Of course it would be sheer hypocrisy to add salt or any other thing to our food, deluding ourselves that it is necessary for the system if as a matter of fact it is not.

Developing along these lines we find we have to give up many things that we have been enjoying, as they are not needed for nutrition. And one who thus gives up a multitude of eatables will acquire self-control in the natural course of things. This subject has received such scant attention, that choice of food with this observance in view is a very difficult matter.

Parents, out of false affection, give their children a variety of foods, ruin their constitutions, and create in them artificial tastes. When they grow up, they have diseased bodies and perverted tastes. The evil consequences of this early indulgence dog us at every step; we waste much money and fall an easy prey to the medicine man.

Most of us, instead of keeping the organs of sense under control, become their slaves. An experienced physician once observed that he had never seen a healthy man. The body is injured every time that one over-eats, and the injury can be partially repaired only by fasting.

No one need take fright at my observations, or give up the effort in despair. The taking of a vow does not mean, that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning; it does mean constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed with a view to its fulfilment. We must not practise self-deception by resorting to some makebelieve. To degrade or cheapen an ideal for our convenience is to practise untruth and to lower ourselves. To understand an ideal and then to make a herculean effort to reach it, no matter how difficult it is, — this is *purushartha*,



manly endeavour. One who at all times fulfils the key observances in their perfection has nothing else left for him to do in this world; he is *bhagavan*, perfect man, he is a *yogi*. We humble seekers can but put forth a slow but steady effort, which is sure to win divine grace for us in God's good time, and all artificial tastes will then disappear with the realization of the Highest.

We must not be thinking of food all the twenty-four hours of the day. The only thing needful is perpetual vigilance, which will help us to find out very soon when we eat for self-indulgence, and when in order only to sustain the body. This being discovered, we must resolutely set our faces against mere indulgence. A common kitchen where this principle is observed is very helpful, as it relieves us from the necessity of thinking out the *menu* for each day, and provides us with acceptable food of which we may take only a limited quantity with a contented and thankful mind. The authorities of a common kitchen lighten our burden and serve as watch-dogs of our observance. They will not pamper us, they will cook only such food as helps us to keep the body a fit instrument for service. In an ideal state the sun should be our only cook. But I know that we are far, far away from that happy state.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. IV

## VII & VIII NON-STEALING AND NON-POSSESSION

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### NON-STEALING

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

We now come to the observance of Non-stealing. Like the last two this is also implicit in Truth. Love may be deduced from Truth, or may be paired with Truth. Truth and Love are one and the same thing. I am partial to Truth however. In the final analysis there can only be a single reality. The highest Truth stands by itself. Truth is the end, Love a means thereto. We know what

is Love or non-violence, although we find it difficult to follow the law of Love. But as for Truth we know only a fraction of it. Perfect knowledge of Truth is difficult of attainment for man even like the perfect practice of non-violence.

It is impossible that a person should steal, and simultaneously claim to know Truth or cherish Love. Yet every one of us is consciously or unconsciously more or less guilty of theft. We may steal not only what belongs to others, but what also belongs to ourselves, as is done, for instance, by a father who eats something secretly, keeping his children in the dark about it. The Ashram kitchen stores are our common property, but one who secretly removes a single crystal of sugar from it stamps himself a thief. It is theft to take anything belonging to another without his permission, even if it be with his knowledge. It is equally theft to take something in the belief that it is nobody's property. Things found on the roadside belong to the ruler or the local authority. Anything found near the Ashram must be handed over to the secretary, who in his turn will pass it on to the police if it is not Ashram property.

Thus far it is pretty smooth sailing. But the observance of Non-stealing goes very much farther. It is theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no real need of it. We should not receive any single thing that we do not need. Theft of this description generally has food for its object. It is theft for me to take any fruit that I do not need, or to take it in a larger quantity than is necessary. We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves. If we devote some thought to the subject, we shall find that we can get rid of quite a number of our wants. One who follows the observance of Non-stealing will bring about a progressive reduction of his own wants. Much of the distressing poverty in this world has arisen out of breaches of the principle of Non-stealing.

Theft, thus far considered, may be termed external or physical theft. There is besides another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is



theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others, or to cast a greedy eye on it. One who takes no food, physically speaking, is generally said to be fasting, but he is guilty of theft as well as a breach of his fast, if he gives himself up to a mental contemplation of pleasure, when he sees others taking their meals. He is similarly guilty, if during his fast he is continually planning the varied *menu* he will have after breaking the fast.

One, who observes the principle of Non-stealing, will refuse to bother himself about things to be acquired in the future. This evil anxiety for the future will be found at the root of many a theft. Today we only desire possession of a thing; tomorrow we shall begin to adopt measures, straight if possible, crooked when thought necessary, to acquire its possession.

Ideas may be stolen no less than material things. One who egotistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him, is guilty of a theft of ideas. Many learned men have committed such theft in the course of world history, and plagiarism is by no means uncommon even today. Supposing, for instance, that I see a new type of spinning wheel in Andhra, and manufacture a similar wheel in the Ashram, passing it off as my own invention, I practise untruth, and am clearly guilty of stealing another's invention.

One who takes up the observance of Non-stealing has therefore to be humble, thoughtful, vigilant and in habits simple.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yervada Mandir, (1957 Edn.), Chap. V*



## NON-STEALING, AND NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY

These two, along with Truth, Ahimsa and *brahmacharya* that have gone before, constitute the five *mahavratas* (primary observances) of old and have been included in the Ashram observances as they are necessary for one who seeks self-realization. But they do not call for any lengthy discussion.

### 1. Non-stealing

To take something from another without his permission is theft of course. But it is also theft to use a thing for a purpose different from the one intended by the lender or to use it for a period longer than that which has been fixed with him. The profound truth upon which this observance is based is that God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. Therefore, whoever appropriates more than the minimum that is really necessary for him is guilty of theft.

### 2. Non-possession or Poverty

This is covered by Non-stealing. We may neither take nor keep a superfluous thing. It is therefore a breach of this observance to possess food or furniture which we do not really need. He who can do without chairs will not keep them in his house. The seeker will deliberately and voluntarily reduce his wants and cultivate progressively simple habits.

Non-stealing and Non-possession are mental states only. No human being can keep these observances to perfection. The body too is a possession, and so long as it is there, it calls for other possessions in its train. But the seeker will cultivate the spirit of detachment and give up one possession after another. Every one cannot be judged by the same standard. An ant may fall from grace if it stores two grains instead of one. An elephant on the other hand will have a lot of grass heaped before itself and yet it cannot be charged with having 'great possessions'.

These difficulties appear to have given rise to the current conception of *sannyasa* (renunciation of the world), which is not accepted by the Ashram. Such *sannyasa* may be necessary for some rare spirit who has the power of conferring benefits upon the world by only thinking good thoughts in a cave. But the world would be ruined if every one became a cave-dweller. Ordinary men and women can only cultivate mental detachment. Whoever lives in the world and lives in it only for serving it is a *sannyasi*.

We of the Ashram hope to become *sannyasis* in this sense. We may keep necessary things but should be ready to give up everything including our bodies. The loss of nothing whatever should worry us at all. So long as we are alive, we should render such service as we are capable of. It is a good thing if we get food to eat and clothes to wear; it is also a good thing if we don't. We should so train our minds that no Ashramite will fail to give a good account of himself when testing time comes.

*Ashram Observances in Action*, (1959 Edn.), Chap. V

## NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

Non-possession is allied to Non-stealing. A thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if we possess it without needing it. Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow; He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured, that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from



day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted; while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. Perfect fulfilment of the ideal of Non-possession requires, that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming impossibility. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Judging by this criterion, we find, that in the Ashram we possess many things, the necessity for which cannot be proved, and we thus tempt our neighbours to thief.

From the standpoint of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. It has been truly said, that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body, and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths. The soul is omnipresent; why should she care to be confined within the cagelike body, or do evil and even kill for the sake of that cage? We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purposes of service



so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fulness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember, that Non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. A man who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection we may consider the definition of knowledge contained in the 13th chapter of the Gita. We are there told, that humility (*amanitvam*) etc., constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true, —and there is no doubt that it is true,— much that we hug today as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and therefore only does us harm, instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but that activity should be *sattvika*, tending to Truth. One who has consecrated his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But we have to learn to distinguish between good activity and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. VI

## NON-POSSESSION THE HIGHEST FULFILMENT OF RELIGION

(From "On Another's Land")

So long as I own property I must defend it whether by the force of law-courts or by the force of my own strong arms. The act is in essence the same. Our national non-co-operation is or was with a system. It presupposed co-operation among ourselves in a general way. But when we non-co-operate among ourselves, national non-co-operation is a mirage. Individual non-co-operation is possible when we own not a clod of earth. It is possible only for a *sannyasin*. The highest fulfilment of religion therefore requires a giving up of all possession. Having ascertained the law of our being, we must set about reducing it to practice to the extent of our capacity and no further. That is the middle way. When a robber comes to take away A's property he can deliver the property to him, if he recognizes in him a blood-brother. If he does not feel like one but dreads the robber and would wish that some one was near to knock him down, he must try to knock him down and take the consequence. If he has the desire but not the ability to fight the robber, he must allow himself to be robbed and then call in the assistance of law-courts to regain the lost property. In both the cases he has as good a chance of losing his property as of regaining it. If he is a sane man like me, he would reach with me the conclusion that to be really happy he must not own anything or own things only so long as his neighbours permit him. In the last resort we live not by our physical strength but by sufferance. Hence the necessity of uttermost humility and absolute reliance on God. This is living by soul-force. This is highest self-expression.

Let us bear the law in mind not as an academic and attractive proposition when it is written on paper but as the law of our being to be continually realized and let us fashion our practice in accordance with the law and the measure of our ability to live up to it.

*Young India*, 5-2-'25, p. 48



## DIGNITY OF POVERTY

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal being the gist of Gandhiji's discourse at a prayer meeting in Panchgani)

In the song that had been sung it was said that God is the friend of the poor. Poverty, remarked Gandhiji had a dignity in our country. The poor man was not ashamed of his poverty. He preferred his hut to the rich man's palace. He even took pride in it. Though poor in material goods, he was not poor in spirit. Contentment was his treasure. He might as well say to himself, "Since we cannot all become rich and own palaces, let us at least pull down the palaces of the rich and bring them down to our level." That could bring no happiness or peace either to themselves or anyone else, and God would certainly be not the friend and helper of the poor of such description. Poverty, in the sense of inequality of material possessions was there in every part of the world. That was perhaps in a certain measure inevitable, for all men are not equal either in their talents or the measure of their needs. Even in America which was fabulously rich and where Mammon has taken the place of God, there were many poor. Poet Malabari had come across some relatives of Shah Alam begging in the streets of Rangoon. He had written a beautiful poem about it which had sunk into his heart. The substance of it was that he alone is rich who has God for his friend and helper. In India there was a particular type of man who delighted in having as few needs as possible. He carried with him only a little flour and a pinch of salt and chillies tied in his napkin. He had a *lota* and a string to draw water from the well. He needed nothing else. He walked on foot covering 10-12 miles a day. He made the dough in his napkin, collected a few twigs to make a fire and baked his dough on the embers. It was called *bati*. He had tasted it and found it most delicious. The relish did not lie in the food but in the appetite, that honest toil and the contentment of the mind give. Such a man had God as his companion and friend and felt richer than any king or emperor.



God was not the friend of those who inwardly coveted other's riches. Everyone could copy that example and enjoy ineffable peace and happiness himself and radiate it to others. On the other hand if one hankered after riches, one had to resort to exploitation, by whatever name it might be called. Even then the crores could not become millionaires. True happiness lay in contentment and companionship with God only.

*Harijan*, 21-7-'46, p. 230 at p. 232

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## VOLUNTARY POVERTY

(From an address at the Guildhouse, London, delivered on 23-9-1931)

When I found myself drawn into the political coil, I asked myself what was necessary for me in order to remain absolutely untouched by immorality, by untruth, by what is known as political gain. . . . I do not propose to take you through all the details of that act or performance interesting and, to me, sacred though they are — but I can only tell you that it was a difficult struggle in the beginning and it was a wrestle with my wife and — as I can vividly recall — with my children also. Be that as it may, I came definitely to the conclusion that, if I had to serve the people in whose midst my life was cast and of whose difficulties I was witness from day-to-day, I must discard all wealth, all possession.

I cannot tell you with truth that, when this belief came to me, I discarded everything immediately. I must confess to you that progress at first was slow. And now, as I recall those days of struggle, I remember that it was also painful in the beginning. But, as days went by, I saw that I had to throw overboard many other things which I used to consider as mine, and a time came when it became a matter of positive joy to give up those things. And one after another then, by almost geometric progression, the things slipped away from me. And, as I am describing my experiences, I can say a great burden fell off my shoulders and I felt that I could now walk with ease and do my work also in the service of my fellowmen with great comfort

and still greater joy. The possession of anything then became a troublesome thing and a burden.

Exploring the cause of that joy, I found that, if I kept anything as my own, I had to defend it against the whole world. I found also that there were many people who did not have the thing, although they wanted it; and I would have to seek police assistance also if hungry, famine-stricken people, finding me in a lonely place, wanted not merely to divide the thing with me but to dispossess me. And I said to myself: if they want it and would take it, they do so not from any malicious motive, but they would do it because theirs was a greater need than mine.

And then I said to myself: possession seems to me to be a crime; I can only possess certain things when I know that others, who also want to possess similar things, are able to do so. But we know — everyone of us can speak from experience — that such a thing is an impossibility. Therefore, the only thing that can be possessed by all is non-possession, not to have anything whatsoever. In other words, a willing surrender.

You might then well say to me: but you are keeping many things on your body even as you are speaking about voluntary poverty and not possessing anything whatsoever. And your taunt would be right, if you only superficially understood the meaning of the thing that I am speaking about just now. It is really the spirit behind. Whilst you have the body, you will have to have something to clothe the body with also. But then you will take for the body not all that you can get, but the least possible, the least with which you can do. You will take for your house not many mansions, but the least cover that you can do with. And similarly with reference to your food and so on.

Now you see that there is here a daily conflict between what you and we understand today as civilization and the state which I am picturing to you as a state of bliss and a desirable state. On the other hand, the basis of culture for civilization is understood to be the multiplication of all your wants. If you have one room, you will desire to have two rooms, three rooms, the more the merrier. And similarly, you will want to have as much furniture



as you can put in your house, and so on, endlessly. And the more you possess, the better culture you represent, or some such thing. I am putting it, perhaps, not as nicely as the advocates of that civilization would put it, but I am putting it to you in the manner I understand it.

And on the other hand, you find the less you possess, the less you want, the better you are. And better for what? Not for enjoyment of this life, but for enjoyment of personal service to your fellow-beings; service to which you dedicate yourselves, body, soul and mind. . . even the body is not yours. It has been given to you as a temporary possession, and it can also be taken from you by Him who has given it to you.

Therefore, having that absolute conviction in me, such must be my constant desire that this body also may be surrendered at the will of God, and while it is at my disposal, must be used not for dissipation, not for self-indulgence, not for pleasure, but merely for service and service the whole of your waking hours. And if this is true with reference to the body, how much more with reference to clothing and other things that we use? . . .

And those who have actually followed out this vow of voluntary poverty to the fullest extent possible (to reach absolute perfection is an impossibility, but the fullest possible extent for a human being), those who have reached the ideal of that state, they testify that when you dispossess yourself of everything you have, you really possess all the treasures of the world. In other words, you really get all that is in reality necessary for you, everything. If food is necessary, food will come to you.

Many of you are men and women of prayer, and I have heard from very many Christian lips that they got their food in answer to prayer, that they get everything in answer to prayer. I believe it. But I want you to come with me a step further and believe with me that those who voluntarily give up everything on earth, including the body — that is to say, have readiness to give up everything (and they must examine themselves critically, rigidly, and give always an adverse judgment against themselves) — those who will follow this out will really find that they are never in want. . . .



Want must not again be taken literally. God is the hardest taskmaster I have known on this earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing you, and you are sinking, He comes to your assistance somehow or other and proves to you that you must not lose your faith and that He is always at your beck and call, but on His terms, not on your terms. So I have found. I cannot really recall a single instance when at the eleventh hour, He has forsaken me.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (G.A. Natesan & Co., 4th Edn.), p. 1066

## IX BREAD LABOUR

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### BREAD LABOUR

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on bread labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. Tolstoy advertised it and gave it wider publicity. In my view, the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita where we are told, that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean bread labour.

Reason too leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man, who does not do body labour, have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread,' says the Bible. A millionaire cannot carry on for long, and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He therefore induces hunger by exercise, and helps himself to the food he eats. If every one, whether rich or poor, has thus to take exercise in some shape or form, why should it not assume the form of productive, i.e., bread labour? No one asks

the cultivator to take breathing exercise or to work his muscles. And more than nine-tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority, at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food! And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed, if such people took a hand in it. Again invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, when every one without exception acknowledged the obligation of bread labour. It is common to all the *varnas*. There is a world-wide conflict between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship truth, and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate, everybody is not in a position to take it. A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture however to be the ideal. Every one must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating; and the best thing would be for every one to dispose of his own waste. If this is impossible, each family should see to its own scavenging. I have felt for years, that there must be something radically wrong, where scavenging has been made the concern of a separate class in society. We have no historical record of the man, who first assigned the lowest status to this essential sanitary service. Whoever he was, he by no means did us a good. We should, from our very childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is, for every one who has realized this, to commence bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

From *Yeravda Mandir*, (1957 Edn.), Chap. IX



## THE PLACE OF BREAD LABOUR IN THE LIFE OF THE ASHRAM

The Ashram holds that every man and woman must work in order to live. This principle came home to me upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays. Referring to the Russian writer Bondaref, Tolstoy observes that his discovery of the vital importance of bread labour is one of the most remarkable discoveries of modern times. The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food, and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune but only in the service of mankind. If this principle is observed everywhere, all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin.

It is possible that this golden rule will never be observed by the whole world. Millions observe it in spite of themselves without understanding it. But their mind is working in a contrary direction, so that they are unhappy themselves and their labour is not as fruitful as it should be. This state of things serves as an incentive to those who understand and seek to practise the rule. By rendering a willing obedience to it they enjoy good health as well as perfect peace and develop their capacity for service.

Tolstoy made a deep impression on my mind, and even in South Africa I began to observe the rule to the best of my ability. And ever since the Ashram was founded, bread labour has been perhaps its most characteristic feature.

In my opinion the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the Gita. I do not go so far as to say that the word *yajna* (sacrifice) there means body labour. But when the Gita says that 'rain comes from sacrifice' (verse 14) I think it indicates the necessity of bodily labour. The 'residue of sacrifice' (verse 13) is the bread that we have won in the sweat of our brow. Labouring enough for one's food has been classed in the Gita as a *yajna*. Whoever eats more than is enough for sustaining the body is a thief, for



most of us hardly perform labour enough to maintain ourselves. I believe that a man has no right to receive anything more than his keep, and that every one who labours is entitled to a living wage.

This does not rule out the division of labour. The manufacture of everything needed to satisfy essential human wants involves bodily labour, so that labour in all essential occupations counts as bread labour. But as many of us do not perform such labour, they have to take exercise in order to preserve their health. A cultivator working on his farm from day to day has not to take breathing exercise or stretch his muscles. Indeed if he observes the other laws of health, he will never be afflicted with illness.

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if any one appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution. The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than they need. We may utilize the gifts of nature just as we choose, but in her books the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column.

This law is not invalidated by the fact that men raise bigger crops by mechanizing agriculture and using artificial fertilizers, and similarly increase the industrial output. This only means a transformation of natural energy. Try as we might, the balance is always nil.

Be that as it may, the observance best kept in the Ashram is that of bread labour, and no wonder. Its fulfilment is easy with ordinary care. For certain hours in the day, there is nothing to be done but work. Work is therefore bound to be put in. A worker may be lazy, inefficient or inattentive, but he works for a number of hours all the same. Again certain kinds of labour are capable of yielding an immediate product and the worker cannot idle away a considerable amount of his time. In an institution where body labour plays a prominent part there are few servants. Drawing water, splitting firewood, cleaning and filling lamps with oil, sanitary service, sweeping the roads and houses, washing one's clothes, cooking, — all these tasks must always be performed.

Besides this there are various activities carried on in the Ashram as a result of and in order to help fulfilment of observances, such as agriculture, dairying, weaving, carpentry, tanning and the like which must be attended to by many members of the Ashram.

All these activities may be deemed sufficient for keeping the observance of bread labour, but another essential feature of *yajna* (sacrifice) is the idea of serving others, and the Ashram will perhaps be found wanting from this latter standpoint. The Ashram ideal is to live to serve. In such an institution there is no room for idleness or shirking duty, and everything should be done with right goodwill. If this were actually the case, the Ashram ministry would be more fruitful than it is. But we are still very far from such a happy condition. Therefore although in a sense every activity in the Ashram is of the nature of *yajna*, it is compulsory for all to spin for at least one hour in the name of God incarnated as the Poor (*Daridranarayana*).

People often say that in an institution like the Ashram where body labour is given pride of place there is no scope for intellectual development, but my experience is just the reverse. Every one who has been to the Ashram has made intellectual progress as well; I know of none who was the worse on account of a sojourn in the Ashram.

Intellectual development is often supposed to mean a knowledge of facts concerning the universe. I freely admit that such knowledge is not laboriously imparted to the students in the Ashram. But if intellectual progress spells understanding and discrimination, there is adequate provision for it in the Ashram. Where body labour is performed for mere wages, it is possible that the labourer becomes dull and listless. No one tells him how and why things are done; he himself has no curiosity and takes no interest in his work. But such is not the case in the Ashram. Everything including sanitary service must be done intelligently, enthusiastically and for the love of God. Thus there is scope for intellectual development in all departments of Ashram activity. Every one is encouraged to acquire full knowledge of his own subject. Any one who neglects to do this must



answer for it. Every one in the Ashram is a labourer; none is a wage-slave.

It is a gross superstition to imagine that knowledge is acquired only through books. We must discard this error. Reading books has a place in life, but is useful only in its own place. If book-knowledge is cultivated at the cost of body labour, we must raise a revolt against it. Most of our time must be devoted to body labour, and only a little to reading. As in India today the rich and the so-called higher classes despise body labour, it is very necessary to insist on the dignity of labour. Even for real intellectual development one should engage in some useful bodily activity.

It is desirable if at all possible that the Ashram should give the workers some more time for reading. It is also desirable that illiterate Ashramites should have a teacher to help them in their studies. But it appears that time for reading and the like cannot be given at the cost of any of the present activities of the Ashram. Nor can we engage paid teachers, and so long as the Ashram cannot attract more men who are capable of teaching ordinary school subjects, we have to manage with as many such as we have got in our midst. The school — and college — educated men who are in the Ashram have not still fully acquired the skill of correlating the three R's with body labour. This is a new experiment for all of us. But we shall learn from experience, and those of us who have received ordinary education will by and by find out ways and means of imparting their knowledge to others.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*Ashram Observances in Action*, (1959 Edn.), Chap. VI



## MUST A RECLUSE PERFORM BREAD LABOUR?

## I

(From "Weekly Notes" by M. D.)

During the period of silence there are few visitors, and those who come rarely trouble Gandhiji. But there are occasions when interviews have to be given and even sought. The occasion on which an interview had to be sought was when an old co-worker and a member of the Ashram, but now a recluse, made his appearance in our midst. A graduate of the Bombay University, full of beans and intellectual ambition, he came to Gandhiji when Non-co-operation was at its height. He had thrown up a research scholarship and became a lecturer in the National College. In the ordinary course he found his way to jail, where he learnt to outlive the habits of his delicate upbringing, and came out fired with a spiritual ambition. The late Shyamji Krishnavarma, his uncle, intending him to succeed him, asked him to go to Europe. He did go but returned as soon as he went, sick of all that the West had shown him, and began his experiments in spiritual research. He stayed on in our midst for some years, went on periodical fasts, on the last occasion fasting for 55 days, and then one day left us, sick alike of all that we had shown him. He tortured the flesh to the extent of sewing up his lips and wearing nothing but an iron belt round his groin, and begged from door to door. Some months ago Gandhiji saw him during the Harijan tour. He had been silent for years and would not speak, but he owned that the spiritual kinship with Gandhiji was now, if anything, stronger. Three or four months ago he wrote a postcard to Gandhiji to say that he intended walking to Wardha to see Gandhiji, that he had decided to break his silence only to talk to Gandhiji, and that he would cover the distance in some months. Doubting Thomases like the present writer feared that in view of Gandhiji's uncertain programmes the meeting would never take place. But evidently the recluse Bhansali had no such

doubts and he came, sure enough bare-bodied and bare-footed, he had walked all these months, without anything on earth to call his own. He came and sat down in our midst, again one of us and yet so unlike us. He had no questions to ask, no curiosity to satisfy. All that was on our side. He would eat corn flour with water and *neem* leaves, if some one gave them to him, and sat in a corner of our room disturbing none, disturbed by none. But if he had conquered all curiosity, we had not, Gandhiji had not; and twice after evening prayers Gandhiji asked him to come and reply to his questions as he wrote them. After three years he opened his lips.

“Does this diet suit you?”

“Quite.”

“Perhaps the *neem* leaves are a great help?”

“Undoubtedly. In winter I have to drop them, as these limbs have a rheumatic tendency.”

“Don’t you find the leaves too bitter?”

He laughed. “Well, there are varieties even among *neem* trees, and while some leaves are very bitter, some are not. The palate gets accustomed to this diet, so much so that it relishes it. There again crops up the question of the control of the palate!”

“And where do you sleep? You have nothing to spread or cover yourself with.”

“Just where I chance to be, and have just what I chance to get.”

“You won’t mind a mattress and a bedsheet and a wrap?”

“No, but I have slept often under the trees, often on bare earth and under the open sky, and often on the burning ground.”

“Ever troubled by dangerous reptiles or animals?”

“Hardly ever. I was once stung by a scorpion, but it was no more than an insect bite. Snakes I have come across and once a leopard, but none of them meant any harm and there was no fear in me.”

“Any queer experiences on the burning ground?”

“I must own that there is a species of disembodied beings, but one need not believe in them. I have met them,



and that is the fear that sometimes lurks in me. But soon I pull myself together."

"Do you have to speak, if only to beg for your flour?"

"No."

"Do you manage to get it always?"

"No. I have often had to go without any food. Once for three days running I had no food. Whilst some would willingly feed me, some have doubted my bona fides, — some have taken me to be a cheat, and some a member of the C. I. D."

"Do you think of any of your old friends or relations that were once a source of worry to you?"

"Never. All memory is gone."

"Does the grinding poverty of the villagers oppress you?"

"Rather. That reminds me of all you have written about it. I think of some of the most heart-moving of your writings like 'Death Dance' in *Young India*, and feel that the 'Death Dance' is going on, more relentlessly if possible, and feel that I have no right even to the handfuls of flour I eat. I am glad that I do not rob them any more, and the living presence of Death in the burial ground is somewhat of a consolation."

"Then, you will some day come back to me and yet fulfil my cherished dream about you? Won't you?"

"I wish I could say it. I do not know. God alone knows. May be, there is a lingering chance."

"What do you think of the whole day?"

"I have *mantras* which I constantly repeat. Nothing disturbs me, nothing worries me."

"Then all fear is gone?"

"Indeed. I swim in the ocean of peace. All that is due to you. You taught me all this. I have forgotten most of my past, but not the discourses on the Gita you used to give us, nor your discourses on *Pilgrim's Progress*. Undisturbed peace is my privilege. Sleep practically untroubled by dreams. I have been often held up to ridicule and contempt. I have rejoiced in it and often craved for it. All I now want is the extinction of even that craving. Why should I rejoice over ridicule if I do not rejoice over praise? Undisturbed



equanimity I want — that equability to praise and blame and heat and cold. I wish, if I could, not to delight even in travail. But what a dandy I used to be, Bapu! Oh the days of dandyism! It is the mind that makes a heaven of hell and hell of heaven. There is no end to my peace now, and yet what a dandy I used to be once?" With this he laughed a hearty laugh.

"Where do you sit all day?"

"Downstairs, in the room. Friends come and go. I am perfectly untroubled and peaceful. I do not even know who comes and goes."

"That is real victory," said Gandhiji.

At this we left our pilgrim brother, with whom mentally at any rate we had travelled to the reaches he had attained. Whether the peace that passeth understanding is his we do not know, but there is no doubt that like John Bunyan, the renowned pilgrim, he has found the peace that he has in the knowledge that

He that is down needs fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.

*Harijan*, 13-4-'35, p. 65 at p. 66

## II

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

I devoted a fair amount of space last week to the pen-portrait of the recluse friend who is now in our midst. I must continue the story. For it was no vain curiosity on the part of Gandhiji that prompted him to put those numerous questions to the recluse who had been silent for years and had broken the silence just for him. It was not curiosity but overflowing love, as we shall see.

G.: As you sit in your meditation, are you troubled by extraneous thoughts?

B.: No, never.

G.: Never during the day?

B.: Not so. Whilst I am not engaged in my meditation, I think of the talks we are having, and I put your questions to myself again and again.

G.: You do. Well, then, you said the other day that when you see all the surrounding misery you are considerably agitated. Don't you feel like doing your little bit to lessen it?

B.: No, though it may seem strange.

G.: But, then, what is the meaning of being agitated?

B.: I feel the misery myself, but also feel that I am powerless to do anything.

G.: When a thorn pierces your foot, you pull it out, don't you?

B.: Yes.

G.: When you feel hungry, you eat, don't you?

B.: I do.

G.: Then if you find a thorn piercing someone else's foot, would you not help him to pull it out? If you find some one suffering from pangs of hunger, would you not feed him?

B.: I would, if I could.

G.: If there was someone who was going through agonies and there was none but you to tend him, would you not sit down to do so?

B.: I would, but I could not do much. I should confess my helplessness.

G.: Surely, one like you would not shirk responsibility so lightly?

The recluse smiled a winsome smile in reply.

G.: But we started with the premise that the surrounding misery agitates you, and that, as you yourself said, you see the death dance in ever fiercer reality.

B.: I do. But I declare my helplessness.

G.: Only he who has exhausted all efforts may say that he can do nothing more. If he has a lame person to attend to, he will give him all the attention that he is capable of. This one act of service will mean the service of humanity.

B.: But I could not exclusively devote my attention to relieving the misery of the distressed. I would do a little bit, but I should soon feel powerless.

G.: The world is sustained by sacrifice and service. As the Gita says, 'The Lord created the beings with the duty of sacrifice cast on them.'



B.: I know. But are not meditation and worship too sacred a duty?

G.: Meditation and worship are not exclusive things like jewels to be kept locked up in a strong box. They must be seen in every act of ours. But I will not press you for a reply today. I simply want to set you thinking about this. You know that you are always in my thoughts.

The next morning our friend, contrary to his wont, went to Gandhiji and said that he was very much distressed that he should be a source of worry to him, but he repeated that he was helpless.

“Not a bit of it,” replied Gandhiji. “I felt I must share my feelings with you, and so I asked you those questions.”

“Please don’t think of giving me up.”

“I will not think of giving you up. But I want you to do nothing that does not appeal to you. At the same time let me also plead with you. However, I am sure that, whether you are in a cave or working in the midst of multitudes, all is well with you.”

The talk was continued the next evening.

G.: Though you have told me that all that I have said does not alter your conviction, you will please let me harp on the same subject a little while longer.

B.: You have every right, Bapu. Only I thought I might tell you how my mind was working.

G.: Of course I know your mind. But knowing your mind how is it that I do not feel like copying your example? Of course I should love to trudge about like you from one end of the country to the other, and if my body allowed it, I should like to live on uncooked flour and *neem* leaves. But I find there is a serious flaw in your way of life. As a seeker after Truth, if I find that yours is the true way, it would be my duty to adopt it. On the other hand, if I feel that there is some serious error in it, it is my duty to draw your attention to it. As I have told you I have no quarrel with your flour or with your *neem* leaves. What I cannot understand is that you should ignore a vital condition of our very existence, I mean the principle of sacrifice with which we are born.

B.: I should like you to make this a little clearer.



G.: You know that the Gita says that he who eats without offering the daily sacrifice steals his food. To beg one's food is a good thing, but only after one has offered one's sacrifice.

B.: I have heard it. I was pondering the whole day over what you said the other day. I wondered if I had any right to eat my flour and *neem* leaves as I did no work.

G.: Yes, you have heard it. But the world accepts the principle and acts upon it, e.g. Jain *munis* and *sannyasis*. They live on alms, but they do so because they persuade themselves that they are offering sufficient sacrifice in the shape of the teaching they impart. Here they are somewhat mistaken, as I think. It is their duty to impart spiritual teaching, but all the same they must offer some sacrifice in the shape of bread labour, and rather than expect their food as a reward of their sacrifice, they should, like true Brahmins live on the charity of the people. All, therefore, that I have to tell you again is that you must shake yourself of this illusion. To do no work is no renunciation. It is inertia. What I have written has universal experience in support of it, and my own life is an eloquent witness to it. You interrupted your wanderings and came here out of love for me. God sent you here. How best am I to requite your love? Not by treating you to good food. You would not care to have it, I would not care to give it. But I must pour out to you what the purest love bids the heart to do.

B.: I am deeply thankful. I must go over all that you have said.

There was one more talk on the subject, which for the moment may be regarded as final.

G.: Well, have you thought over what I have said?

B.: I have, but, I confess, to no effect. The fact is that for ten years my views have run along this line. Even when I was in England, I said to myself I should adopt *sannyasa* on my return, and, if anything, the years that have elapsed have strengthened the old conviction.

G.: I know the conviction has been long with you.

B.: Yes, and I have not found any reason to alter it. Pray pardon me, if I am rude.

G.: There is no question of rudeness. If plain-speaking were rudeness, I am simply saturated with it. No, I am glad you are speaking to me your mind quite frankly. But there I will leave you. I do not want to tax you any further.

*Harijan*, 20-4-'35, p. 73 at p. 74

## X HUMILITY

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### HUMILITY

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930)

Humility cannot be an observance by itself. For it does not lend itself to being deliberately practised. It is however an indispensable test of Ahimsa. In one who has Ahimsa in him it becomes part of his very nature.

A preliminary draft of the rules and regulations of the Satyagraha Ashram was circulated among friends, including the late Sir Gurdas Banerji. He suggested, that humility should be accorded a place among the observances. This suggestion could not then be accepted for the reason that I have just mentioned.

But although humility is not one of the observances, it is certainly as essential as, and perhaps even more essential, than any one of them. Only it has never come to any one by practice. Truth can be cultivated as well as Love. But to cultivate humility is tantamount to cultivating hypocrisy. Humility must not be here confounded with mere manners or etiquette. One man will sometimes prostrate himself before another, although his heart is full of bitterness against him. This is not humility, but cunning. A man may chant *Ramanama*, or tell his beads all day long, and move in society like a sage; but if he is selfish at heart, he is not meek, but only hypocritical.

A humble person is not himself conscious of his humility. Truth and the like perhaps admit of measurement, but not humility. Inborn humility can never remain hidden, and yet the possessor is unaware of its existence. The story of Vasishtha and Vishvamitra furnishes a very good case



in point. Humility should make the possessor realize, that he is as nothing. Directly we imagine ourselves to be something, there is egotism. If a man who keeps observances is proud of keeping them, they will lose much, if not all of their value. And a man who is proud of his virtue often becomes a curse to society. Society will not appreciate it, and he himself will fail to reap any benefit from it. Only a little thought will suffice to convince us, that all creatures are nothing more than a mere atom in this universe. Our existence as embodied beings is purely momentary; what are a hundred years in eternity? But if we shatter the chains of egotism, and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity. To feel that we are something is to set up a barrier between God and ourselves; to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God. A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it. But it is dried up, as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean. We do not exaggerate, when we say that life on earth is a mere bubble.

A life of service must be one of humility. He who would sacrifice his life for others, has hardly time to reserve for himself a place in the sun. Inertia must not be mistaken for humility, as it has been in Hinduism. True humility means most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed towards the service of humanity. God is continuously in action without resting for a single moment. If we would serve Him or become one with Him, our activity must be as unwearied as His. There may be momentary rest in store for the drop which is separated from the ocean, but not for the drop in the ocean, which knows no rest. The same is the case with ourselves. As soon as we become one with the ocean in the shape of God, there is no more rest for us, nor indeed do we need rest any longer. Our very sleep is action. For we sleep with the thought of God in our hearts. This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never-ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable. This supreme state of total surrender is difficult to describe, but not beyond the bounds of human experience. It has been attained by many dedicated souls, and may be attained by ourselves as well. This is the goal which we



of the Satyagraha Ashram have set before ourselves; all our observances and activities are calculated to assist us in reaching it. We shall reach it some day all unawares if we have truth in us.

(Translated into English by V. G. Desai from Gujarati)

*From Yeravda Mandir, (1957 Edn.), Chap. XII*

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## THE CURSE OF 'I' AND 'MINE'

(Only Mahatma Gandhi's comment on the condensed report of a speech of Sjt. S. C. Mukerjee at a peace meeting is reproduced below.)

If we could erase the 'I's and the 'Mine's from religion, politics, economics etc., we shall soon be free and bring heaven upon earth.

*Young India, 23-9-'26, p. 335*

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## PLEA FOR HUMILITY

In my talks with public workers in Bengal I came across a young man who among his claims for public recognition mentioned his and his fellow workers' *brahmacharya* or celibacy. The manner of presenting the claim and the self-assurance with which the young man spoke repelled me and I felt that he was talking about things he little knew. His fellow-workers repudiated the claim. And the young man himself when I cross-questioned him admitted that the claim could not be sustained. A man who consciously sins with his mind, even though he may not sin with his body is not a celibate. One who cannot remain unmoved at the sight of a woman, however beautiful she may be, is not a celibate. One who keeps his body under control from sheer necessity, does well but is not a celibate. We may not degrade sacred words by a loose use of them. True celibacy has important results which can be verified. It is a difficult virtue to practise. Many attempt it but few

succeed. Those who walk about the country in the garb of *sannyasins* are often no more celibates than the ordinary man in the street. Only the latter is often a better man as he makes no pretension to virtue. He is satisfied that his Maker knows his trials, temptations and his century of triumphs in resisting temptations as also his few falls in spite of heroic attempts. He is satisfied to be judged by the world for his falls. His successes he treasures secretly like a miser. He is too humble to make them known. Such a man has hope of redemption. Not so the self-satisfied *sannyasin* who does not even know the ABC of restraint. There is danger of public workers who do not wear the garb of *sannyasin* but who prate about sacrifice and celibacy making both cheap and discrediting themselves and their mission of service.

When I drew up the rules for the guidance of the Ashram at Sabarmati, I circulated copies among friends for advice and criticism. One was sent to the late Sir Gurudas Banerjee. In acknowledging his copy he advised me to add humility to the vows mentioned in the rules. In his letter he said that young workers lacked humility. I told the late Sir Gurudas that whilst I valued his advice and fully recognized the necessity of humility, the mention of it as a vow would derogate from its dignity. It must be taken for granted that those who cultivate truth, Ahimsa, *brahmacharya*, must be humble. Truth without humility would be an arrogant caricature. He who wants to practise truth knows how hard it is. The world may applaud his so-called triumphs. Little does the world know his falls. A truthful man is a chastened being. He has need to be humble. A man who wants to love the whole world including one who calls himself his enemy knows how impossible it is to do so in his own strength. He must be as mere dust before he can understand the elements of Ahimsa. He is nothing if he does not daily grow in humility as he grows in love. A man who would have his eye single, who would regard every woman as his blood-sister or mother, has to be less than dust. He stands on the bank of a precipice. The slightest turn of the head brings him down. He dare not whisper his virtue to his very own. For he knows not what



the next moment has in store for him. For him 'pride goeth before destruction and haughtiness before a fall'. Well has the Gita said, 'Passions subside in a fasting man, not the desire for them. The desire goes only when man sees God face to face.' And no one can see God face to face who has aught of the 'I' in him. He must become a cypher if he would see God. Who shall dare say in this storm-tossed universe, 'I have won'? God triumphs in us, never we.

Let us not lower the values of these virtues so that we may all be able to claim them. What is true of the physical world is true of the spiritual. If in order to gain a worldly battle, Europe sacrificed several million lives during the late war, itself a transitory event, what wonder that in the spiritual battle millions have to perish in the attempt so that one complete example may be left to the world. It is ours merely to make the attempt in the uttermost humility.

The cultivation of these higher virtues is its own reward. He who cashes any one of them loses his soul. Virtues are not to trade with. My truth, my Ahimsa, my *brahmacharya* are matters between myself and my Maker. They are not articles of trade. Any young man who dares to trade with them will do so at his peril. The world has no standard, no means, wherewith to judge these things. They defy scrutiny and analysis. Let us workers, therefore, cultivate them for our own purification. Let the world be asked to judge us only by our work. An institution or an Ashram that claims public support must have a material object, e.g. a hospital, a school, spinning and Khaddar propaganda. The public have the right to know the worth of these activities and if they approve of them, they may support them. The conditions are obvious. There must be honesty and ability about the managers. An honest man who knows nothing of pedagogy has no claim to public support as a teacher. These public institutions must keep proper and audited accounts which should be subject to inspection by the public. These are the tests which conductors have to satisfy. Their private character must not obtrude itself upon public attention for admiration and patronage.



## SELF-DEPENDENCE V. INTER-DEPENDENCE

(The following extracts are reproduced from the article published under the title "Our Helplessness".)

Inter-dependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being. Without inter-relation with society he cannot realize his oneness with the universe or suppress his egotism. His social inter-dependence enables him to test his faith and to prove himself on the touchstone of reality. If man were so placed or could so place himself as to be absolutely above all dependence on his fellow-beings he would become so proud and arrogant as to be a veritable burden and nuisance to the world. Dependence on society teaches him the lesson of humility. That a man ought to be able to satisfy most of his essential needs himself is obvious; but it is no less obvious to me that when self-sufficiency is carried to the length of isolating oneself from society it almost amounts to sin. A man cannot become self-sufficient even in respect of all the various operations from the growing of cotton to the spinning of the yarn. He has at some stage or other to take the aid of the members of his family. And if one may take help from one's own family why not from one's neighbours? Or otherwise what is the significance of the great saying, 'The world is my family'?

Financial excess is a thing always to be shunned. The 'middle path' is the royal road. Self-dependence is a necessary ideal so long as and to the extent that it is an aid to one's self-respect and spiritual discipline. It becomes an obsession and a hindrance when it is pushed beyond that limit. On the other hand inter-dependence when it is not inconsistent with one's self-respect is necessary to bring home to man the lesson of humility and the omnipotence of God. One must strike a golden mean between these two extremes. A fanaticism that refuses to discriminate is the negation of all ideal.

*Young India*, 21-3-'29, p. 93

## NEW YEAR DAY GREETINGS

(This letter of New Year Day greetings written by Bapu from Champaran to Shri Maganlal Gandhi then in Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, is reproduced from Mahadevbhai's Diary (Gujarati), Vol. IV.)

New Year Day, 1974 (*Vikram*),  
Motihari (Bihar)

What shall I give you on this auspicious day? I am trying to send to you what you and I and many others lack. If you get that you have got everything. But what could I give if I were to follow the rule that only he who possesses can give? But let us pray for it together.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Read this, ponder over it. Read it over again. Read the original in English from the Bible and translate it into

Hindi. Ruminates over it and strive to have even for one moment a large glimpse of Charity that is Love. Mira had that glimpse and felt its pangs. If we could have the glimpse and feel its pangs and could have the capacity to make others feel those pangs, we could move the world. But though the thing is in me, I feel that I lack it every moment. The lack is indeed great. Due to this lack I sometimes feel like "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal". Only yesterday I did not find time for those who wanted me. This tortured me. This is no sign of charity. I was "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal".

May the new year be fruitful to you. May your physical, mental and spiritual capacities go on increasing and may you out of your love lay all those at the feet of Mother India. This is my wish. And these are my blessings.

Bapu's *Ashirvad*

*Harijan*, 11-11-'50, p. 316



## SECTION TWO : THE STORY OF MY PRACTICE OF RELIGION

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### INTRODUCTION

Four or five years ago, at the instance of some of my nearest co-workers, I agreed to write my autobiography. I made the start, but scarcely had I turned over the first sheet when riots broke out in Bombay and the work remained at a standstill. Then followed a series of events which culminated in my imprisonment at Yeravda. Sjt. Jeramdas, who was one of my fellow-prisoners there, asked me to put everything else on one side and finish writing the autobiography. I replied that I had already framed a programme of study for myself, and that I could not think of doing anything else until this course was complete. I should indeed have finished the autobiography had I gone through my full term of imprisonment at Yeravda, for there was still a year left to complete the task, when I was discharged. Swami Anand has now repeated the proposal, and as I have finished the history of Satyagraha in South Africa, I am tempted to undertake the autobiography for *Navajivan*. The Swami wanted me to write it separately for publication as a book. But I have no spare time. I could only write a chapter week by week. Something has to be written for *Navajivan* every week. Why should it not be the autobiography? The Swami agreed to the proposal, and here am I hard at work.

But a God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. "What has set you on this adventure?" he asked. "Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence. And what will you write? Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as

principles today, or supposing you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your word, spoken or written, may be misled? Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet?"

This argument had some effect on me. But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. I believe, or at any rate flatter myself with the belief, that a connected account of all these experiments will not be without benefit to the reader. My experiments in the political field are now known, not only to India, but to a certain extent to the 'civilized' world. For me, they have not much value; and the title of 'Mahatma' that they have won for me has, therefore, even less. Often the title has deeply pained me; and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my humility. The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations.

What I want to achieve, — what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years, — is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*\*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end. But as I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the

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\* Lit. freedom from birth and death. The nearest English equivalent is salvation.



closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value. There are some things which are known only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual, or rather moral; for the essence of religion is morality.

Only those matters of religion that can be comprehended as much by children as by older people, will be included in this story. If I can narrate them in a dispassionate and humble spirit, many other experimenters will find in them provision for their onward march. Far be it from me to claim any degree of perfection for these experiments. I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final. For if they were not, I should base no action on them. But at every step I have carried out the process of acceptance or rejection and acted accordingly. And so long as my acts satisfy my reason and my heart, I must firmly adhere to my original conclusions.

If I had only to discuss academic principles, I should clearly not attempt an autobiography. But my purpose being to give an account of various practical applications of these principles, I have given the chapters I propose to write the title of *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. These will of course include experiments with non-violence, celibacy and other principles of conduct believed to be distinct from truth. But for me, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. There are innumerable definitions of God,



because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it. That relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler. Though this path is strait and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge, for me it has been the quickest and easiest. Even my Himalayan blunders have seemed trifling to me because I have kept strictly to this path. For the path has saved me from coming to grief, and I have gone forward according to my light. Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that He alone is real and all else is unreal. Let those, who wish, realize how the conviction has grown upon me; let them share my experiments and share also my conviction if they can. The further conviction has been growing upon me that whatever is possible for me is possible even for a child, and I have sound reasons for saying so. The instruments for the quest of truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child. The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of truth. The dialogue between Vasishtha and Vishwamitra makes this abundantly clear. Christianity and Islam also amply bear it out.

If anything that I write in these pages should strike the reader as being touched with pride, then he must take it that there is something wrong with my quest, and that my glimpses are no more than mirage. Let hundreds like me perish, but let truth prevail. Let us not reduce the standard of truth even by a hair's breadth for judging erring mortals like myself.

I hope and pray that no one will regard the advice interspersed in the following chapters as authoritative. The experiments narrated should be regarded as illustrations, in the light of which every one may carry on his own experiments according to his own inclinations and capacity. I trust that to this limited extent the illustrations will be really helpful; because I am not going either to conceal or understate any ugly things that must be told. I hope to acquaint the reader fully with all my faults and errors. My purpose is to describe experiments in the science of Satyagraha, not to say how good I am. In judging myself I shall try to be as harsh as truth, as I want others also to be. Measuring myself by that standard I must exclaim with Surdas :

Where is there a wretch  
So wicked and loathsome as I?  
I have forsaken my Maker,  
So faithless have I been.

For it is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him, Who as I fully know, governs every breath of my life, and Whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him, and yet I cannot get away from them.

But I must close. I can only take up the actual story in the next chapter.

The Ashram, Sabarmati,  
26th November, 1925

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, "Introduction"*



## GLIMPSES OF RELIGION

From my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part. And yet I kept on picking up things here and there from my surroundings. The term 'religion' I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self.

Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the *Haveli*. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality being practised there, and lost all interest in it. Hence I could gain nothing from the *Haveli*.

But what I failed to get there I obtained from my nurse, an old servant of the family, whose affection for me I still recall. I have said before that there was in me a fear of ghosts and spirits. Rambha, for that was her name, suggested, as a remedy for this fear, the repetition of *Ramanama*. I had more faith in her than in her remedy, and so at a tender age I began repeating *Ramanama* to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits. This was of course short-lived, but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today *Ramanama* is an infallible remedy for me.

Just about this time, a cousin of mine who was a devotee of the *Ramayana* arranged for my second brother and me to learn *Rama Raksha*. We got it by heart, and made it a rule to recite it every morning after the bath. The practice was kept up as long as we were in Porbandar. As soon as we reached Rajkot, it was forgotten. For I had not much belief in it. I recited it partly because of my pride in being able to recite *Rama Raksha* with correct pronunciation.



What, however, left a deep impression on me was the reading of the *Ramayana* before my father. During part of his illness my father was in Porbandar. There every evening he used to listen to the *Ramayana*. The reader was a great devotee of Rama, — Ladha Maharaj of Bileshvar. It was said of him that he cured himself of his leprosy not by any medicine, but by applying to the affected parts *bilva* leaves which had been cast away after being offered to the image of Mahadeva in Bileshvar temple, and by the regular repetition of *Ramanama*. His faith, it was said, had made him whole. This may or may not be true. We at any rate believed the story. And it is a fact that when Ladha Maharaj began his reading of the *Ramayana* his body was entirely free from leprosy. He had a melodious voice. He would sing the *Dohas* (couplets) and *Chopais* (quatrains), and explain them, losing himself in the discourse and carrying his listeners along with him. I must have been thirteen at that time, but I quite remember being enraptured by his reading. That laid the foundation of my deep devotion to the *Ramayana*. Today I regard the *Ramayana* of Tulasidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature.

A few months after this we came to Rajkot. There was no *Ramayana* reading there. The *Bhagavat*, however, used to be read on every *Ekadashi*\* day. Sometimes I attended the reading, but the reciter was uninspiring. Today I see that the *Bhagavat* is a book which can evoke religious fervour. I have read it in Gujarati with intense interest. But when I heard portions of the original read by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya during my twenty-one days' fast, I wished I had heard it in my childhood from such a devotee as he is, so that I could have formed a liking for it at an early age. Impressions formed at that age strike roots deep down into one's nature, and it is my perpetual regret that I was not fortunate enough to hear more good books of this kind read during that period.

In Rajkot, however, I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. For my father and mother would visit the *Haveli* as also

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\* Eleventh day of the bright and the dark half of lunar month.

Shiva's and Rama's temples, and would take or send us youngsters there. Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us — non-Jains. They would have talks with my father on subjects religious and mundane.

He had, besides, Musalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths.

Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.

But the fact that I had learnt to be tolerant to other religions did not mean that I had any living faith in God. I happened, about this time, to come across *Manusmriti*\* which was amongst my father's collection. The story of the creation and similar things in it did not impress me very much, but on the contrary made me incline somewhat towards atheism.

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\* Laws of Manu, a Hindu law-giver. They have the sanction of religion.



There was a cousin of mine, still alive, for whose intellect I had great regard. To him I turned with my doubts. But he could not resolve them. He sent me away with this answer : 'When you grow up, you will be able to solve these doubts yourself. These questions ought not to be raised at your age.' I was silenced, but was not comforted. Chapters about diet and the like in *Manusmriti* seemed to me to run contrary to daily practice. To my doubts as to this also, I got the same answer. 'With intellect more developed and with more reading I shall understand it better,' I said to myself.

*Manusmriti* at any rate did not then teach me *Ahimsa*. I have told the story of my meat-eating. *Manusmriti* seemed to support it. I also felt that it was quite moral to kill serpents, bugs and the like. I remember to have killed at that age bugs and such other insects, regarding it as a duty.

But one thing took deep root in me — the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality. Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening.

A Gujarati didactic stanza likewise gripped my mind and heart. Its precept — return good for evil — became my guiding principle. It became such a passion with me that I began numerous experiments in it. Here are those (for me) wonderful lines :

For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;  
 For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;  
 For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;  
 If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold.  
 Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;  
 Every little service tenfold they reward.  
 But the truly noble know all men as one,  
 And return with gladness good for evil done.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part I, Chap. X



## ACQUAINTANCE WITH RELIGIONS

Towards the end of my second year in England I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation — *The Song Celestial* — and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine poem neither in Samskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the *Gita*, but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Samskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them. The verses in the second chapter

If one

Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs  
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,  
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds  
Recklessness; then the memory — all betrayed —  
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,  
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.

made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom. I have read almost all the English translations of it, and I regard Sir Edwin Arnold's as the best. He has been faithful to the text, and yet it does not read like a translation. Though I read the *Gita* with these friends, I cannot pretend to have studied it then. It was only after some years that it became a book of daily reading.

The brothers also recommended *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, whom I knew till then as the author only of *The Song Celestial*, and I read it with even greater

interest than I did the *Bhagavadgita*. Once I had begun it I could not leave off. They also took me on one occasion to the Blavatsky Lodge and introduced me to Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant. The latter had just then joined the Theosophical Society, and I was following with great interest the controversy about her conversion. The friends advised me to join the Society, but I politely declined saying, 'With my meagre knowledge of my own religion I do not want to belong to any religious body.' I recall having read, at the brothers' instance, Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. This book stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.

About the same time I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding house. He talked to me about Christianity. I narrated to him my Rajkot recollections. He was pained to hear them. He said, 'I am a vegetarian. I do not drink. Many Christians are meat-eaters and drink, no doubt; but neither meat-eating nor drinking is enjoined by Scripture. Do please read the Bible.' I accepted his advice, and he got me a copy. I have a faint recollection that he himself used to sell copies of the Bible, and I purchased from him an edition containing maps, concordance, and other aids. I began reading it, but I could not possibly read through the Old Testament. I read the book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of Numbers.

But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*. The verses, 'But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too,' delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal' etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of



the *Gita*, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly.

This reading whetted my appetite for studying the lives of other religious teachers. A friend recommended Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. I read the chapter on the Hero as a prophet and learnt of the Prophet's greatness and bravery and austere living.

Beyond this acquaintance with religion I could not go at the moment, as reading for the examination left me scarcely any time for outside subjects. But I took mental note of the fact that I should read more religious books and acquaint myself with all the principal religions.

And how could I help knowing something of atheism too? Every Indian knew Bradlaugh's name and his so-called atheism. I read some book about it, the name of which I forget. It had no effect on me, for I had already crossed the Sahara of atheism. Mrs. Besant who was then very much in the limelight, had turned to theism from atheism, and that fact also strengthened my aversion to atheism. I had read her book *How I Became a Theosophist*.

It was about this time that Bradlaugh died. He was buried in the Woking Cemetery. I attended the funeral, as I believe every Indian residing in London did. A few clergymen also were present to do him the last honours. On our way back from the funeral we had to wait at the station for our train. A champion atheist from the crowd heckled one of these clergymen. 'Well, sir, you believe in the existence of God?'

'I do,' said the good man in a low tone.

'You also agree that the circumference of the Earth is 28,000 miles, don't you?' said the atheist with a smile of self-assurance.

'Indeed.'

'Pray tell me then the size of your God and where he may be?'

'Well, if we but knew, He resides in the hearts of us both.'

'Now, now, don't take me to be a child,' said the champion with a triumphant look at us.

The clergyman assumed a humble silence.

This talk still further increased my prejudice against atheism.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part I, Chap. XX

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निर्बल के बल राम\*

Though I had acquired a nodding acquaintance with Hinduism and other religions of the world, I should have known that it would not be enough to save me in my trials. Of the thing that sustains him through trials man has no inkling, much less knowledge, at the time. If an unbeliever, he will attribute his safety to chance. If a believer, he will say God saved him. He will conclude, as well he may, that his religious study or spiritual discipline was at the back of the state of grace within him. But in the hour of his deliverance he does not know whether his spiritual discipline or something else saves him. Who that has prided himself on his spiritual strength has not seen it humbled to the dust? A knowledge of religion, as distinguished from experience, seems but chaff in such moments of trial.

It was in England that I first discovered the futility of mere religious knowledge. How I was saved on previous occasions is more than I can say, for I was very young then; but now I was twenty and had gained some experience as husband and father.

During the last year, as far as I can remember, of my stay in England, that is in 1890, there was a Vegetarian Conference at Portsmouth to which an Indian friend and I were invited. Portsmouth is a sea-port with a large naval population. It has many houses with women of ill fame, women not actually prostitutes, but at the same time, not very scrupulous about their morals. We were put up in one of these houses. Needless to say, the Reception Committee did not know anything about it. It would have

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\* 'Nirbal ke bala Rama' — Refrain of Surdas' famous hymn, 'He is the help of the helpless, the strength of the weak.'



been difficult in a town like Portsmouth to find out which were good lodgings and which were bad for occasional travellers like us.

We returned from the Conference in the evening. After dinner we sat down to play a rubber of bridge, in which our landlady joined, as is customary in England even in respectable households. Every player indulges in innocent jokes as a matter of course, but here my companion and our hostess began to make indecent ones as well. I did not know that my friend was an adept in the art. It captured me and I also joined in. Just when I was about to go beyond the limit, leaving the cards and the game to themselves, God through the good companion uttered the blessed warning : 'Whence this devil in you, my boy? Be off, quick!'

I was ashamed. I took the warning and expressed within myself gratefulness to my friend. Remembering the vow I had taken before my mother, I fled from the scene. To my room I went quaking, trembling, and with beating heart, like a quarry escaped from its pursuer.

I recall this as the first occasion on which a woman, other than my wife, moved me to lust. I passed that night sleeplessly, all kinds of thoughts assailing me. Should I leave this house? Should I run away from the place? Where was I? What would happen to me if I had not my wits about me? I decided to act thenceforth with great caution; not to leave the house, but somehow leave Portsmouth. The Conference was not to go on for more than two days, and I remember I left Portsmouth the next evening, my companion staying there some time longer.

I did not then know the essence of religion or of God, and how He works in us. Only vaguely I understood that God had saved me on that occasion. On all occasions of trial He has saved me. I know that the phrase 'God saved me' has a deeper meaning for me today, and still I feel that I have not yet grasped its entire meaning. Only richer experience can help me to a fuller understanding. But in all my trials — of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions, and in politics — I can say that God saved me. When every hope is gone, 'when helpers fail and

comforts flee,' I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.

Such worship or prayer is no flight of eloquence; it is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. If, therefore, we achieve that purity of the heart when it is 'emptied of all but love', if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they 'trembling pass in music out of sight'. Prayer needs no speech. It is in itself independent of any sensuous effort. I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part I, Chap. XXI

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### RAYCHANDBHAI

I landed at Bombay from *S. S. Assam*. The sea was rough in the harbour, and I had to reach the quay in a launch.

My elder brother had come to meet me at the dock. He had already made the acquaintance of Dr. Mehta and his elder brother, and as Dr. Mehta insisted on putting me up at his house, we went there. Thus the acquaintance begun in England continued in India and ripened into a permanent friendship between the two families.

Dr. Mehta introduced me to several friends, one of them being his brother Shri Revashankar Jagjivan, with whom there grew up a lifelong friendship. But the introduction that I need particularly take note of was the one to the poet Raychand or Rajchandra, the son-in-law of an elder brother of Dr. Mehta, and partner of the firm of jewellers conducted in the name of Revashankar Jagjivan. He was not above twenty-five then, but my first meeting with him convinced me that he was a man of great character and learning. He was also known as *shatavadhani* (one having the faculty of remembering or attending to a hundred



things simultaneously), and Dr. Mehta recommended me to see some of his memory feats. I exhausted my vocabulary of all the European tongues I knew, and asked the poet to repeat the words. He did so in the precise order in which I had given them. I envied his gift without, however, coming under its spell. The thing that did cast its spell over me I came to know afterwards. This was his wide knowledge of the scriptures, his spotless character, and his burning passion for self-realization. I saw later that this last was the only thing for which he lived. The following lines of Muktanand were always on his lips and engraved on the tablets of his heart:

‘I shall think myself blessed only when I see Him  
In every one of my daily acts;  
Verily He is the thread,  
Which supports Muktanand’s life.’

Raychandbhai’s commercial transactions covered hundreds of thousands. He was a connoisseur of pearls and diamonds. No knotty business problem was too difficult for him. But all these things were not the centre round which his life revolved. That centre was the passion to see God face to face. Amongst the things on his business table there were invariably to be found some religious book and his diary. The moment he finished his business he opened the religious book or the diary. Much of his published writings is a reproduction from this diary. The man who, immediately on finishing his talk about weighty business transactions, began to write about the hidden things of the spirit could evidently not be a businessman at all, but a real seeker after Truth. And I saw him thus absorbed in godly pursuits in the midst of business, not once or twice, but very often. I never saw him lose his state of equipoise. There was no business or other selfish tie that bound him to me, and yet I enjoyed the closest association with him. I was but a briefless barrister then, and yet whenever I saw him he would engage me in conversation of a seriously religious nature. Though I was then groping and could not be said to have any serious interest in religious discussion, still I found his talk of absorbing interest. I have since met many a religious leader or teacher. I have tried

to meet the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did. His words went straight home to me. His intellect compelled as great a regard from me as his moral earnestness, and deep down in me was the conviction that he would never willingly lead me astray and would always confide to me his innermost thoughts. In my moments of spiritual crisis, therefore, he was my refuge.

And yet in spite of this regard for him I could not enthrone him in my heart as my Guru. The throne has remained vacant and my search still continues.

I believe in the Hindu theory of Guru and his importance in spiritual realization. I think there is a great deal of truth in the doctrine that true knowledge is impossible without a Guru. An imperfect teacher may be tolerable in mundane matters, but not in spiritual matters. Only a perfect *gnani*\* deserves to be enthroned as Guru. There must, therefore, be ceaseless striving after perfection. For one gets the Guru that one deserves. Infinite striving after perfection is one's right. It is its own reward. The rest is in the hands of God.

Thus, though I could not place Raychandbhai on the throne of my heart as Guru, we shall see how he was, on many occasions, my guide and helper. Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life, and captivated me : Raychandbhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book, *The Kingdom of God Is within You*; and Ruskin by his *Unto This Last*. But of these more in their proper place.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part II, Chap. I

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\* A knowing one, a seer.



## FIRST DAY IN PRETORIA

I had expected someone on behalf of Dada Abdulla's attorney to meet me at Pretoria station. I knew that no Indian would be there to receive me, since I had particularly promised not to put up at an Indian house. But the attorney had sent no one. I understood later that, as I had arrived on a Sunday, he could not have sent anyone without inconvenience. I was perplexed, and wondered where to go, as I feared that no hotel would accept me.

Pretoria station in 1893 was quite different from what it was in 1914. The lights were burning dimly. The travellers were few. I let all the other passengers go and thought that, as soon as the ticket collector was fairly free, I would hand him my ticket and ask him if he could direct me to some small hotel or any other such place where I might go; otherwise I would spend the night at the station. I must confess I shrank from asking him even this, for I was afraid of being insulted.

The station became clear of all passengers. I gave my ticket to the ticket collector and began my inquiries. He replied to me courteously, but I saw that he could not be of any considerable help. But an American Negro who was standing near by broke into the conversation.

'I see,' said he, 'that you are an utter stranger here, without any friends. If you will come with me, I will take you to a small hotel, of which the proprietor is an American who is very well known to me. I think he will accept you.'

I had my own doubts about the offer, but I thanked him and accepted his suggestion. He took me to Johnston's Family Hotel. He drew Mr. Johnston aside to speak to him, and the latter agreed to accommodate me for the night, on condition that I should have my dinner served in my room.

'I assure you,' said he, 'that I have no colour prejudice. But I have only European custom, and, if I allowed you to eat in the dining-room, my guests might be offended and even go away.'

‘Thank you,’ said I, ‘even for accommodating me for the night. I am now more or less acquainted with the conditions here, and I understand your difficulty. I do not mind your serving the dinner in my room. I hope to be able to make some other arrangement tomorrow.’

I was shown into a room, where I now sat waiting for the dinner and musing, as I was quite alone. There were not many guests in the hotel, and I had expected the waiter to come very shortly with the dinner. Instead Mr. Johnston appeared. He said: ‘I was ashamed of having asked you to have your dinner here. So I spoke to the other guests about you, and asked them if they would mind your having your dinner in the dining-room. They said they had no objection, and that they did not mind your staying here as long as you liked. Please, therefore, come to the dining-room, if you will, and stay here as long as you wish.’

I thanked him again, went to the dining-room and had a hearty dinner.

Next morning I called on the attorney, Mr. A. W. Baker. Abdulla Sheth had given me some description of him, so his cordial reception did not surprise me. He received me very warmly and made kind inquiries. I explained all about myself. Thereupon he said: ‘We have no work for you here as barrister, for we have engaged the best counsel. The case is a prolonged and complicated one, so I shall take your assistance only to the extent of getting necessary information. And of course you will make communication with my client easy for me, as I shall now ask for all the information I want from him through you. That is certainly an advantage. I have not yet found rooms for you. I thought I had better do so after having seen you. There is a fearful amount of colour prejudice here, and therefore it is not easy to find lodgings for such as you. But I know a poor woman. She is the wife of a baker. I think she will take you and thus add to her income at the same time. Come, let us go to her place.’

So he took me to her house. He spoke with her privately about me, and she agreed to accept me as a boarder at 35 shillings a week.



Mr. Baker, besides being an attorney, was a staunch lay preacher. He is still alive and now engaged purely in missionary work, having given up the legal profession. He is quite well-to-do. He still corresponds with me. In his letters he always dwells on the same theme. He upholds the excellence of Christianity from various points of view, and contends that it is impossible to find eternal peace, unless one accepts Jesus as the only son of God and the Saviour of mankind.

During the very first interview Mr. Baker ascertained my religious views. I said to him: 'I am a Hindu by birth. And yet I do not know much of Hinduism, and I know less of other religions. In fact I do not know where I am, and what is and what should be my belief. I intend to make a careful study of my own religion and, as far as I can, of other religions as well.'

Mr. Baker was glad to hear all this, and said: 'I am one of the Directors of the South Africa General Mission. I have built a church at my own expense, and deliver sermons in it regularly. I am free from colour prejudice. I have some co-workers, and we meet at one o'clock every day for a few minutes and pray for peace and light. I shall be glad if you will join us there. I shall introduce you to my co-workers who will be happy to meet you, and I dare say you will also like their company. I shall give you, besides some religious books to read, though of course the book of books is the Holy Bible, which I would specially recommend to you.'

I thanked Mr. Baker and agreed to attend the one o'clock prayers as regularly as possible.

'So I shall expect you here tomorrow at one o'clock, and we shall go together to pray,' added Mr. Baker, and we said good-bye.

I had little time for reflection just yet.

I went to Mr. Johnston, paid the bill and removed to the new lodgings, where I had my lunch. The landlady was a good woman. She had cooked a vegetarian meal for me. It was not long before I made myself quite at home with the family.

I next went to see the friend to whom Dada Abdulla had given me a note. From him I learnt more about the hardships of Indians in South Africa. He insisted that I should stay with him. I thanked him, and told him that I had already made arrangements. He urged me not to hesitate to ask for anything I needed.

It was now dark. I returned home, had my dinner, went to my room and lay there absorbed in deep thought. There was not any immediate work for me. I informed Abdulla Sheth of it. What, I thought, can be the meaning of Mr. Baker's interest in me? What shall I gain from his religious co-workers? How far should I undertake the study of Christianity? How was I to obtain literature about Hinduism? And how was I to understand Christianity in its proper perspective without thoroughly knowing my own religion? I could come to only one conclusion: I should make a dispassionate study of all that came to me, and deal with Mr. Baker's group as God might guide me; I should not think of embracing another religion before I had fully understood my own.

Thus musing I fell asleep.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part II, Chap. X*

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### CHRISTIAN CONTACTS

The next day at one o'clock I went to Mr. Baker's prayer-meeting. There I was introduced to Miss Harris, Miss Gabb, Mr. Coates and others. Everyone knelt down to pray, and I followed suit. The prayers were supplications to God for various things, according to each person's desire. Thus the usual forms were for the day to be passed peacefully, or for God to open the doors of the heart.

A prayer was now added for my welfare: 'Lord, show the path to the new brother who has come amongst us. Give him, Lord, the peace that Thou hast given us. May the Lord Jesus who has saved us save him too. We ask all this in the name of Jesus.' There was no singing of hymns or other music at these meetings. After the supplication



for something special every day, we dispersed, each going to his lunch, that being the hour for it. The prayer did not take more than five minutes.

The Misses Harris and Gabb were both elderly maiden ladies. Mr. Coates was a Quaker. The two ladies lived together, and they gave me a standing invitation to four o'clock tea at their house every Sunday.

When we met on Sundays, I used to give Mr. Coates my religious diary for the week, and discuss with him the books I had read and the impression they had left on me. The ladies used to narrate their sweet experiences and talk about the peace they had found.

Mr. Coates was a frank-hearted staunch young man. We went out for walks together, and he also took me to other Christian friends.

As we came closer to each other, he began to give me books of his own choice, until my shelf was filled with them. He loaded me with books, as it were. In pure faith I consented to read all those books, and as I went on reading them we discussed them.

I read a number of such books in 1893. I do not remember the names of them all, but they included the *Commentary* of Dr. Parker of the City Temple, Pearson's *Many Infallible Proofs* and Butler's *Analogy*. Parts of these were unintelligible to me. I liked some things in them, while I did not like others. *Many Infallible Proofs* were proofs in support of the religion of the Bible, as the author understood it. The book had no effect on me. Parker's *Commentary* was morally stimulating, but it could not be of any help to one who had no faith in the prevalent Christian beliefs. Butler's *Analogy* struck me to be a very profound and difficult book, which should be read four or five times to be understood properly. It seemed to me to be written with a view to converting atheists to theism. The arguments advanced in it regarding the existence of God were unnecessary for me, as I had then passed the stage of unbelief but the arguments in proof of Jesus being the only incarnation of God and the Mediator between God and man left me unmoved.

But Mr. Coates was not the man easily to accept defeat. He had great affection for me. He saw, round my neck, the *Vaishnava* necklace of Tulasi-beads. He thought it to be superstition and was pained by it. 'This superstition does not become you. Come, let me break the necklace.'

'No, you will not. It is a sacred gift from my mother.'

'But do you believe in it?'

'I do not know its mysterious significance. I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it. But I cannot, without sufficient reason, give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love and in the conviction that it would be conducive to my welfare. When, with the passage of time, it wears away and breaks of its own accord, I shall have no desire to get a new one. But this necklace cannot be broken.'

Mr. Coates could not appreciate my argument, as he had no regard for my religion. He was looking forward to delivering me from the abyss of ignorance. He wanted to convince me that, no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity which represented *the* truth, and that my sins would not be washed away except by the intercession of Jesus, and that all good works were useless.

Just as he introduced me to several books, he introduced me to several friends whom he regarded as staunch Christians. One of these introductions was to a family which belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect.

Many of the contacts for which Mr. Coates was responsible were good. Most struck me as being God-fearing. But during my contact with this family, one of the Plymouth confronted me with an argument for which I was not prepared:

'You cannot understand the beauty of our religion. From what you say it appears that you must be brooding over your transgressions every moment of your life, always mending them and atoning for them. How can this ceaseless cycle of action bring you redemption? You can never have peace. You admit that we are all sinners. Now look at the perfection of our belief. Our attempts at improvement and atonement are futile. And yet redemption we



must have. How can we bear the burden of sin? We can but throw it on Jesus. He is the only sinless Son of God. It is His word that those who believe in Him shall have everlasting life. Therein lies God's infinite mercy. And as we believe in the atonement of Jesus, our own sins do not bind us. Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And therefore Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts His great redemption can have eternal peace. Think what a life of restlessness is yours, and what a promise of peace we have.'

The argument utterly failed to convince me. I humbly replied:

'If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless.'

To which the Plymouth Brother rejoined: 'I assure you, your attempt is fruitless. Think again over what I have said.'

And the Brother proved as good as his word. He knowingly committed transgressions, and showed me that he was undisturbed by the thought of them.

But I already knew before meeting with these friends that all Christians did not believe in such a theory of atonement. Mr. Coates himself walked in the fear of God. His heart was pure, and he believed in the possibility of self-purification. The two ladies also shared this belief. Some of the books that came into my hands were full of devotion. So, although Mr. Coates was very much disturbed by this latest experience of mine, I was able to reassure him and tell him that the distorted belief of a Plymouth Brother could not prejudice me against Christianity.

My difficulties lay elsewhere. They were with regard to the Bible and its accepted interpretation.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part II, Chap. XI*

## RELIGIOUS FERMENT

It is now time to turn again to my experiences with Christian friends.

Mr. Baker was getting anxious about my future. He took me to the Wellington Convention. The Protestant Christians organize such gatherings every few years for religious enlightenment or, in other words, self-purification. One may call this religious restoration or revival. The Wellington Convention was of this type. The chairman was the famous divine of the place, the Rev. Andrew Murray. Mr. Baker had hoped that the atmosphere of religious exaltation at the Convention, and the enthusiasm and earnestness of the people attending it, would inevitably lead me to embrace Christianity.

But his final hope was the efficacy of prayer. He had an abiding faith in prayer. It was his firm conviction that God could not but listen to prayer fervently offered. He would cite the instances of men like George Muller of Bristol, who depended entirely on prayer even for his temporal needs. I listened to his discourse on the efficacy of prayer with unbiassed attention, and assured him that nothing could prevent me from embracing Christianity, should I feel the call. I had no hesitation in giving him this assurance, as I had long since taught myself to follow the inner voice. I delighted in submitting to it. To act against it would be difficult and painful to me.

So we went to Wellington. Mr. Baker was hard put to it in having 'a coloured man' like me for his companion. He had to suffer inconveniences on many occasions entirely on account of me. We had to break the journey on the way, as one of the days happened to be a Sunday, and Mr. Baker and his party would not travel on the sabbath. Though the manager of the station hotel agreed to take me in after much altercation, he absolutely refused to admit me to the dining-room. Mr. Baker was not the man to give way easily. He stood by the rights of the guests of a



hotel. But I could see his difficulty. At Wellington also I stayed with Mr. Baker. In spite of his best efforts to conceal the little inconveniences that he was put to, I could see them all.

This Convention was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith. I met the Rev. Murray. I saw that many were praying for me. I liked some of their hymns, they were very sweet.

The Convention lasted for three days. I could understand and appreciate the devoutness of those who attended it. But I saw no reason for changing my belief—my religion. It was impossible for me to believe that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian. When I frankly said so to some of the good Christian friends, they were shocked. But there was no help for it.

My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. Again, according to Christianity only human beings had souls, and not other living beings, for whom death meant complete extinction; while I held a contrary belief. I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of among Christians. Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

I shared this mental churning with my Christian friends whenever there was an opportunity, but their answers could not satisfy me.

Thus if I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could but be a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'être* of a multitude of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying that the Vedas were the inspired Word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?

As Christian friends were endeavouring to convert me, even so were Musalman friends. Abdulla Sheth had kept on inducing me to study Islam, and of course he had always something to say regarding its beauty.

I expressed my difficulties in a letter to Raychandbhai. I also corresponded with other religious authorities in India and received answers from them. Raychandbhai's letter somewhat pacified me. He asked me to be patient and to study Hinduism more deeply. One of his sentences was to this effect : 'On a dispassionate view of the question I am convinced that no other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul, or its charity.'

I purchased Sale's translation of the Koran and began reading it. I also obtained other books on Islam. I communicated with Christian friends in England. One of them introduced me to Edward Maitland, with whom I opened correspondence. He sent me *The Perfect Way*, a book he had written in collaboration with Anna Kingsford. The book was a repudiation of the current Christian belief. He also sent me another book, *The New Interpretation of the Bible*. I liked both. They seemed to support Hinduism. Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance.



My studies thus carried me in a direction unthought of by the Christian friends. My correspondence with Edward Maitland was fairly prolonged, and that with Raychandbhai continued until his death. I read some of the book he sent me. These included *Panchikaran*, *Maniratnamala*, *Mumukshu Prakaran* of *Yogavasishtha*, Haribhadra Suri's *Shaddarshana Samuchchaya* and others.

Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained for ever indebted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact. The years that followed had more, not less, of such sweet and sacred contacts in store for me.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part II, Chap. XV

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### COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service. And service for me was the service of India, because it came to me without my seeking, because I had an aptitude for it. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization.

Christian friends had whetted my appetite for knowledge, which had become almost insatiable, and they would not leave me in peace, even if I desired to be indifferent. In Durban Mr. Spencer Walton, the head of the South Africa General Mission, found me out. I became almost a member of his family. At the back of this acquaintance was of course my contact with Christians in Pretoria. Mr. Walton had a manner all his own. I do not recollect his ever having invited me to embrace Christianity. But he placed his life as an open book before me, and let me watch all his movements. Mrs. Walton was a very gentle

and talented woman. I liked the attitude of this couple. We knew the fundamental differences between us. Any amount of discussion could not efface them. Yet even differences prove helpful, where there are tolerance, charity and truth. I liked Mr. and Mrs. Walton's humility, perseverance and devotion to work, and we met very frequently.

This friendship kept alive my interest in religion. It was impossible now to get the leisure that I used to have in Pretoria for my religious studies. But what little time I could spare I turned to good account. My religious correspondence continued. Raychandbhai was guiding me. Some friend sent me Narmadashanker's book *Dharma Vichar*. Its preface proved very helpful. I had heard about the Bohemian way in which the poet had lived, and a description in the preface of the revolution effected in his life by his religious studies captivated me. I came to like the book, and read it from cover to cover with attention. I read with interest Max Muller's book, *India.—What Can It Teach Us?* and the translation of the *Upanishads* published by the Theosophical Society. All this enhanced my regard for Hinduism, and its beauties began to grow upon me. It did not, however, prejudice me against other religions. I read Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet and His Successors* and Carlyle's panegyric on the prophet. These books raised Muhammad in my estimation. I also read a book called *The Sayings of Zarathustra*.

Thus I gained more knowledge of the different religions. The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies. Thus I began some of the Yogic practices, as well as I could understand them from a reading of the Hindu books. But I could not get on very far, and decided to follow them with the help of some expert when I returned to India. The desire has never been fulfilled.

I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy's books. *The Gospels in Brief*, *What to Do?* and other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.



About the same time I came in contact with another Christian family. At their suggestion I attended the Wesleyan church every Sunday. For these days I also had their standing invitation to dinner. The church did not make a favourable impression on me. The sermons seemed to be uninspiring. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devout souls; they appeared rather to be worldly-minded people, going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom. Here, at times, I would involuntarily doze. I was ashamed, but some of my neighbours, who were in no better case, lightened the shame. I could not go on long like this, and soon gave up attending the service.

My connection with the family I used to visit every Sunday was abruptly broken. In fact it may be said that I was warned to visit it no more. It happened thus. My hostess was a good and simple woman, but somewhat narrow-minded. We always discussed religious subjects. I was then re-reading Arnold's *Light of Asia*. Once we began to compare the life of Jesus with that of Buddha. 'Look at Gautama's compassion!' said I. 'It was not confined to mankind, it was extended to all living beings. Does not one's heart overflow with love to think of the lamb joyously perched on his shoulders? One fails to notice this love for all living beings in the life of Jesus.' The comparison pained the good lady. I could understand her feelings. I cut the matter short, and we went to the dining room. Her son, a cherub aged scarcely five was also with us. I am happiest when in the midst of children, and this youngster and I had long been friends. I spoke derisively of the piece of meat on his plate and in high praise of the apple on mine. The innocent boy was carried away and joined in my praise of the fruit.

But the mother? She was dismayed.

I was warned. I checked myself and changed the subject. The following week I visited the family as usual but not without trepidation. I did not see that I should stop going there, I did not think it proper either. But the good lady made my way easy.

'Mr. Gandhi,' she said, 'please don't take it ill if I feel obliged to tell you that my boy is none the better for

your company. Everyday he hesitates to eat meat and asks for fruit, reminding me of your argument. This is too much. If he gives up meat, he is bound to get weak, if not ill. How could I bear it? Your discussions should henceforth be only with us elders. They are sure to react badly on children.'

'Mrs. — ,' I replied, 'I am sorry. I can understand your feelings as a parent, for I too have children. We can very easily end this unpleasant state of things. What I eat and omit to eat is bound to have a greater effect on the child than what I say. The best way, therefore, is for me to stop these visits. That certainly need not affect our friendship.'

'I thank you,' she said with evident relief.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part II, Chap. XXII*

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### SPIRIT OF SERVICE

My profession progressed satisfactorily, but that was far from satisfying me. The question of further simplifying my life and of doing some concrete act of service to my fellow-men had been constantly agitating me, when a leper came to my door. I had not the heart to dismiss him with a meal. So I offered him shelter, dressed his wounds, and began to look after him. But I could not go on like that indefinitely. I could not afford, I lacked the will to keep him always with me. So I sent him to the Government Hospital for indentured labourers.

But I was still ill at ease. I longed for some humanitarian work of a permanent nature. Dr. Booth was the head of the St. Aidan's Mission. He was a kind-hearted man and treated his patients free. Thanks to Parsi Rustomji's charities, it was possible to open a small charitable hospital under Dr. Booth's charge. I felt strongly inclined to serve as a nurse in this hospital. The work of dispensing medicines took from one to two hours daily, and I made up my mind to find that time from my office-work, so as to be able to fill the place of a compounder in the dispensary attached to the hospital. Most of my professional work



was chamber work, conveyancing and arbitration. I of course used to have a few cases in the magistrate's court, but most of them were of a non-controversial character, and Mr. Khan, who had followed me to South Africa and was then living with me, undertook to take them if I was absent. So I found time to serve in the small hospital. This meant two hours every morning, including the time taken in going to and from the hospital. This work brought me peace. It consisted in ascertaining the patient's complaints, laying the facts before the doctor and dispensing the prescriptions. It brought me in close touch with suffering Indians, most of them indentured Tamil, Telugu or North India men.

The experience stood me in good stead, when during the Boer War I offered my services for nursing the sick and wounded soldiers.

The question of the rearing of children had been ever before me. I had two sons born in South Africa, and my service in the hospital was useful in solving the question of their upbringing. My independent spirit was a constant source of trial. My wife and I had decided to have the best medical aid at the time of her delivery, but if the doctor and the nurse were to leave us in the lurch at the right moment, what was I to do? Then the nurse had to be an Indian. And the difficulty of getting a trained Indian nurse in South Africa can be easily imagined from the similar difficulty in India. So I studied the things necessary for safe labour. I read Dr. Tribhuvandas' book, *Ma-ne Shikhaman* — Advice to a Mother — and I nursed both my children according to the instructions given in the book, tempered here and there by such experience as I had gained elsewhere. The services of a nurse were utilized — not for more than two months each time — chiefly for helping my wife, and not for taking care of the babies, which I did myself.

The birth of the last child put me to the severest test. The travail came on suddenly. The doctor was not immediately available, and some time was lost in fetching the midwife. Even if she had been on the spot, she could not have helped delivery. I had to see through the safe

delivery of the baby. My careful study of the subject in Dr. Tribhuvandas' work was of inestimable help. I was not nervous.

I am convinced that for the proper upbringing of children the parents ought to have a general knowledge of the care and nursing of babies. At every step I have seen the advantages of my careful study of the subject. My children would not have enjoyed the general health that they do today, had I not studied the subject and turned my knowledge to account. We labour under a sort of superstition that the child has nothing to learn during the first five years of its life. On the contrary the fact is that the child never learns in after life what it does in its first five years. The education of the child begins with conception. The physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception are reproduced in the baby. Then during the period of pregnancy it continues to be affected by the mother's moods, desires and temperament, as also by her ways of life. After birth the child imitates the parents, and for a considerable number of years entirely depends on them for its growth.

The couple who realize these things will never have sexual union for the fulfilment of their lust, but only when they desire issue. I think it is the height of ignorance to believe that the sexual act is an independent function necessary like sleeping or eating. The world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the play-ground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. He who realizes this will control his lust at any cost, equip himself with the knowledge necessary for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of his progeny, and give the benefit of that knowledge to posterity.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part III, Chap. VI*



## BRAHMACHARYA — I

We now reach the stage in this story when I began seriously to think of taking the *brahmacharya* vow. I had been wedded to a monogamous ideal ever since my marriage, faithfulness to my wife being part of the love of truth. But it was in South Africa that I came to realize the importance of observing *brahmacharya* even with respect to my wife. I cannot definitely say what circumstance or what book it was, that set my thoughts in that direction, but I have a recollection that the predominant factor was the influence of Raychandbhai, of whom I have already written. I can still recall a conversation that I had with him. On one occasion I spoke to him in high praise of Mrs. Gladstone's devotion to her husband. I had read somewhere that Mrs. Gladstone insisted on preparing tea for Mr. Gladstone even in the House of Commons, and that this had become a rule in the life of this illustrious couple, whose actions were governed by regularity. I spoke of this to the poet, and incidentally eulogized conjugal love. 'Which of the two do you prize more,' asked Raychandbhai, 'the love of Mrs. Gladstone for her husband as his wife, or her devoted service irrespective of her relation to Mr. Gladstone? Supposing she had been his sister, or his devoted servant, and ministered to him with the same attention, what would you have said? Do we not have instances of such devoted sisters or servants? Supposing you had found the same loving devotion in a male servant, would you have been pleased in the same way as in Mrs. Gladstone's case? Just examine the viewpoint suggested by me.'

Raychandbhai was himself married. I have an impression that at the moment his words sounded harsh, but they gripped me irresistibly. The devotion of a servant was, I felt, a thousand times more praiseworthy than that of a wife to her husband. There was nothing surprising in the wife's devotion to her husband, as there

was an indissoluble bond between them. The devotion was perfectly natural. But it required a special effort to cultivate equal devotion between master and servant. The poet's point of view began gradually to grow upon me.

What then, I asked myself, should be my relation with my wife? Did my faithfulness consist in making my wife the instrument of my lust? So long as I was the slave of lust, my faithfulness was worth nothing. To be fair to my wife, I must say that she was never the temptress. It was therefore the easiest thing for me to take the vow of *brahmacharya*, if only I willed it. It was my weak will or lustful attachment that was the obstacle.

Even after my conscience had been roused in the matter, I failed twice. I failed because the motive that actuated the effort was none the highest. My main object was to escape having more children. Whilst in England I had read something about contraceptives. I have already referred to Dr. Allinson's birth control propaganda in the chapter on Vegetarianism. If it had some temporary effect on me, Mr. Hill's opposition to those methods and his advocacy of internal efforts as opposed to outward means, in a word, of self-control, had a far greater effect, which in due time came to be abiding. Seeing, therefore, that I did not desire more children I began to strive after self-control. There was endless difficulty in the task. We began to sleep in separate beds. I decided to retire to bed only after the day's work had left me completely exhausted. All these efforts did not seem to bear much fruit, but when I look back upon the past, I feel that the final resolution was the cumulative effect of those unsuccessful strivings.

The final resolution could only be made as late as 1906. Satyagraha had not then been started. I had not the least notion of its coming. I was practising in Johannesburg at the time of the Zulu 'Rebellion' in Natal, which came soon after the Boer War. I felt that I must offer my services to the Natal Government on that occasion. The offer was accepted, as we shall see in another chapter. But the work set me furiously thinking in the direction of



self-control, and according to my wont I discussed my thoughts with my co-workers. It became my conviction that procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service. I had to break up my household at Johannesburg to be able to serve during the 'Rebellion'. Within one month of offering my services, I had to give up the house I had so carefully furnished. I took my wife and children to Phœnix and led the Indian ambulance corps attached to the Natal forces. During the difficult marches that had then to be performed, the idea flashed upon me that if I wanted to devote myself to the service of the community in this manner, I must relinquish the desire for children and wealth and live the life of a *vanaprastha* — of one retired from household cares.

The 'Rebellion' did not occupy me for more than six weeks, but this brief period proved to be a very important epoch in my life. The importance of vows grew upon me more clearly than ever before. I realized that a vow, far from closing the door to real freedom, opened it. Up to this time I had not met with success because the will had been lacking, because I had had no faith in myself, no faith in the grace of God, and therefore, my mind had been tossed on the boisterous sea of doubt. I realized that in refusing to take a vow man was drawn into temptation, and that to be bound by a vow was like a passage from libertinism to a real monogamous marriage. 'I believe in effort, I do not want to bind myself with vows,' is the mentality of weakness and betrays a subtle desire for the thing to be avoided. Or where can be the difficulty in making a final decision? I vow to flee from the serpent which I know will bite me, I do not simply make an effort to flee from him. I know that mere effort may mean certain death. Mere effort means ignorance of the certain fact that the serpent is bound to kill me. The fact, therefore, that I could rest content with an effort only, means that I have not yet clearly realized the necessity of definite action. 'But supposing my views are changed in the future, how can I bind myself by a vow?' Such a doubt often deters us. But that doubt also betrays a lack of clear

perception that a particular thing must be renounced. That is why Nishkulanand has sung:

‘Renunciation without aversion is not lasting.’  
Where therefore the desire is gone, a vow of renunciation is the natural and inevitable fruit.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. VII

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## BRAHMACHARYA — II

After full discussion and mature deliberation I took the vow in 1906. I had not shared my thoughts with my wife until then, but only consulted her at the time of taking the vow. She had no objection. But I had great difficulty in making the final resolve. I had not the necessary strength. How was I to control my passions? The elimination of carnal relationship with one's wife seemed then a strange thing. But I launched forth with faith in the sustaining power of God.

As I look back upon the twenty years of the vow, I am filled with pleasure and wonderment. The more or less successful practice of self-control had been going on since 1901. But the freedom and joy that came to me after taking the vow had never been experienced before 1906. Before the vow I had been open to being overcome by temptation at any moment. Now the vow was sure shield against temptation. The great potentiality of *brahmacharya* daily became more and more patent to me. The vow was taken when I was in Phoenix. As soon as I was free from ambulance work, I went to Phoenix, whence I had to return to Johannesburg. In about a month of my returning there, the foundation of Satyagraha was laid. As though unknown to me, the *brahmacharya* vow had been preparing me for it. Satyagraha had not been a preconceived plan. It came on spontaneously, without my having willed it. But I could see that all my previous steps had led up to that goal. I had cut down my heavy household expenses at Johannesburg and gone to Phoenix to take, as it were, the *brahmacharya* vow.



The knowledge that a perfect observance of *brahmacharya* means realization of *brahman*, I did not owe to a study of the Shastras. It slowly grew upon me with experience. The Shastric texts on the subject I read only later in life. Every day of the vow has taken me nearer the knowledge that in *brahmacharya* lies the protection of the body, the mind and the soul. For *brahmacharya* was now no process of hard penance, it was a matter of consolation and joy. Every day revealed a fresh beauty in it.

But if it was a matter of ever-increasing joy, let no one believe that it was an easy thing for me. Even when I am past fifty-six years, I realize how hard a thing it is. Every day I realize more and more that it is like walking on the sword's edge, and I see every moment the necessity for eternal vigilance.

Control of the palate is the first essential in the observance of the vow. I found that complete control of the palate made the observance very easy, and so I now pursued my dietetic experiments not merely from the vegetarian's but also from the *brahmachari's* point of view. As the result of these experiments I saw that the *brahmachari's* food should be limited, simple, spiceless, and, if possible, uncooked.

Six years of experiment have showed me that the *brahmachari's* ideal food is fresh fruit and nuts. The immunity from passion that I enjoyed when I lived on this food was unknown to me after I changed that diet. *Brahmacharya* needed no effort on my part in South Africa when I lived on fruits and nuts alone. It has been a matter of very great effort ever since I began to take milk. How I had to go back to milk from a fruit diet will be considered in its proper place. It is enough to observe here that I have not the least doubt that milk diet makes the *brahmacharya* vow difficult to observe. Let no one deduce from this that all *brahmacharis* must give up milk. The effect on *brahmacharya* of different kinds of food can be determined only after numerous experiments. I have yet to find a fruit-substitute for milk which is an equally good muscle-builder and easily digestible. The doctors, *vaidyas* and *hakims* have alike failed to enlighten me. Therefore, though I know

milk to be partly a stimulant, I cannot, for the time being, advise anyone to give it up.

As an external aid to *brahmacharya*, fasting is as necessary as selection and restriction in diet. So overpowering are the senses that they can be kept under control only when they are completely hedged in on all sides, from above and from beneath. It is common knowledge that they are powerless without food, and so fasting undertaken with a view to control of the senses is, I have no doubt, very helpful. With some, fasting is of no avail, because assuming that mechanical fasting alone will make them immune, they keep their bodies without food, but feast their minds upon all sorts of delicacies, thinking all the while what they will eat and what they will drink after the fast terminates. Such fasting helps them in controlling neither palate nor lust. Fasting is useful, when mind co-operates with starving body, that is to say, when it cultivates a distaste for the objects that are denied to the body. Mind is at the root of all sensuality. Fasting, therefore, has a limited use, for a fasting man may continue to be swayed by passion. But it may be said that extinction of the sexual passion is as a rule impossible without fasting, which may be said to be indispensable for the observance of *brahmacharya*. Many aspirants after *brahmacharya* fail, because in the use of their other senses they want to carry on like those who are not *brahmacharis*. Their effort is, therefore, identical with the effort to experience the bracing cold of winter in the scorching summer months. There should be a clear line between the life of a *brahmachari* and of one who is not. The resemblance that there is between the two is only apparent. The distinction ought to be clear as daylight. Both use their eyesight, but whereas the *brahmachari* uses it to see the glories of God, the other uses it to see the frivolity around him. Both use their ears, but whereas the one hears nothing but praises of God, the other feasts his ears upon ribaldry. Both often keep late hours, but whereas the one devotes them to prayer, the other fritters them away in wild and wasteful mirth. Both feed the inner man, but the one only to keep the temple of God in good repair, while the other gorges himself and makes the sacred



vessel a stinking gutter. Thus both live as the poles apart, and the distance between them will grow and not diminish with the passage of time.

*Brahmacharya* means control of the senses in thought, word and deed. Every day I have been realizing more and more the necessity for restraints of the kind I have detailed above. There is no limit to the possibilities of renunciation even as there is none to those of *brahmacharya*. Such *brahmacharya* is impossible of attainment by limited effort. For many it must remain only as an ideal. An aspirant after *brahmacharya* will always be conscious of his shortcomings, will seek out the passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them. So long as thought is not under complete control of the will, *brahmacharya* in its fulness is absent. Involuntary thought is an affection of the mind, and curbing of thought, therefore, means curbing of the mind which is even more difficult to curb than the wind. Nevertheless the existence of God within makes even control of the mind possible. Let no one think that it is impossible because it is difficult. It is the highest goal, and it is no wonder that the highest effort should be necessary to attain it.

But it was after coming to India that I realized that such *brahmacharya* was impossible to attain by mere human effort. Until then I had been labouring under the delusion that fruit diet alone would enable me to eradicate all passions, and I had flattered myself with the belief that I had nothing more to do.

But I must not anticipate the chapter of my struggle. Meanwhile let me make it clear that those who desire to observe *brahmacharya* with a view to realizing God need not despair, provided their faith in God is equal to their confidence in their own effort.

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥

‘The sense-objects turn away from an abstemious soul, leaving the relish behind. The relish also disappears with the realization of the Highest.’\* Therefore His name

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\* The *Bhagavadgita*, 2-59.

and His grace are the last resources of the aspirant after *moksha*. This truth came to me only after my return to India.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. VIII

## 86

## SIMPLE LIFE

I had started on a life of ease and comfort, but the experiment was short-lived. Although I had furnished the house with care, yet it failed to have any hold on me. So no sooner had I launched forth on that life, than I began to cut down expenses. The washerman's bill was heavy, and as he was besides by no means noted for his punctuality, even two or three dozen shirts and collars proved insufficient for me. Collars had to be changed daily and shirts, if not daily, at least every alternate day. This meant a double expense, which appeared to me unnecessary. So I equipped myself with a washing outfit to save it. I bought a book on washing, studied the art and taught it also to my wife. This no doubt added to my work, but its novelty made it a pleasure.

I shall never forget the first collar that I washed myself. I had used more starch than necessary, the iron had not been made hot enough, and for fear of burning the collar I had not pressed it sufficiently. The result was that, though the collar was fairly stiff, the superfluous starch continually dropped off it. I went to court with the collar on, thus inviting the ridicule of brother barristers, but even in those days I could be impervious to ridicule.

'Well,' said I, 'this is my first experiment at washing my own collars and hence the loose starch. But it does not trouble me, and then there is the advantage of providing you with so much fun.'

'But surely there is no lack of laundries here?' asked a friend.

'The laundry bill is very heavy,' said I. 'The charge for washing a collar is almost as much as its price, and even then there is the eternal dependence on the washerman. I prefer by far to wash my things myself.'



But I could not make my friends appreciate the beauty of self-help.. In course of time I became an expert washerman so far as my own work went, and my washing was by no means inferior to laundry washing. My collars were no less stiff or shiny than others.

When Gokhale came to South Africa, he had with him a scarf which was a gift from Mahadeo Govind Ranade. He treasured the memento with the utmost care and used it only on special occasions. One such occasion was the banquet given in his honour by the Johannesburg Indians. The scarf was creased and needed ironing. It was not possible to send it to the laundry and get it back in time. I offered to try my art.

‘I can trust to your capacity as a lawyer, but not as a washerman,’ said Gokhale. ‘What if you should soil it? Do you know what it means to me?’

With this he narrated, with much joy, the story of the gift. I still insisted, guaranteed good work, got his permission to iron it, and won his certificate. After that I did not mind if the rest of the world refused me its certificate.

In the same way, as I freed myself from slavery to the washerman, I threw off dependence on the barber. All people who go to England learn there at least the art of shaving, but none, to my knowledge, learn to cut their own hair. I had to learn that too. I once went to an English hair-cutter in Pretoria. He contemptuously refused to cut my hair. I certainly felt hurt, but immediately purchased a pair of clippers and cut my hair before the mirror. I succeeded more or less in cutting the front hair, but I spoiled the back. The friends in the court shook with laughter.

‘What’s wrong with your hair, Gandhi? Rats have been at it?’

‘No. The white barber would not condescend to touch my black hair,’ said I, ‘so I preferred to cut it myself, no matter how badly.’

The reply did not surprise the friends.

The barber was not at fault in having refused to cut my hair. There was every chance of his losing his custom, if he should serve black men. We do not allow our barbers

to serve our untouchable brethren. I got the reward of this in South Africa, not once, but many times, and the conviction that it was the punishment for our own sins saved me from becoming angry.

The extreme forms in which my passion for self-help and simplicity ultimately expressed itself will be described in their proper place. The seed had been long sown. It only needed watering to take root, to flower and to fructify, and the watering came in due course.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. IX

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## A MONTH WITH GOKHALE—I

From the very first day of my stay with him Gokhale made me feel completely at home. He treated me as though I were his younger brother, he acquainted himself with all my requirements and arranged to see that I got all I needed. Fortunately my wants were few, and as I had cultivated the habit of self-help, I needed very little personal attendance. He was deeply impressed with my habit of fending for myself, my personal cleanliness, perseverance and regularity, and would often overwhelm me with praise.

He seemed to keep nothing private from me. He would introduce me to all the important people that called on him. Of these the one who stands foremost in my memory is Dr. (now Sir) P. C. Ray. He lived practically next door and was a very frequent visitor.

This is how he introduced Dr. Ray: 'This is Prof. Ray who having a monthly salary of Rs. 800, keeps just Rs. 40 for himself and devotes the balance to public purposes. He is not, and does not want to get, married.'

I see little difference between Dr. Ray as he is today and as he used to be then. His dress used to be nearly as simple as it is, with this difference of course that whereas it is Khadi now, it used to be Indian mill-cloth in those days. I felt I could never hear too much of the talks between Gokhale and Dr. Ray, as they all pertained to public good or were of educative value. At times they were



painful too, containing, as they did, strictures on public men. As a result, some of those whom I had regarded as stalwart fighters began to look quite puny.

To see Gokhale at work was as much a joy as an education. He never wasted a minute. His private relations and friendships were all for public good. All his talks had reference only to the good of the country and were absolutely free from any trace of untruth or insincerity. India's poverty and subjection were matters of constant and intense concern to him. Various people sought to interest him in different things. But he gave every one of them the same reply: 'You do the thing yourself. Let me do my own work. What I want is freedom for my country. After that is won, we can think of other things. Today that one thing is enough to engage all my time and energy.'

His reverence for Ranade could be seen every moment. Ranade's authority was final in every matter, and he would cite it at every step. The anniversary of Ranade's death (or birth, I forget which) occurred during my stay with Gokhale, who observed it regularly. There were with him then, besides myself, his friends Prof. Kathavate and a Sub-Judge. He invited us to take part in the celebration, and in his speech he gave us his reminiscences of Ranade. He compared incidentally Ranade, Telang and Mandlik. He eulogized Telang's charming style and Mandlik's greatness as a reformer. Citing an instance of Mandlik's solicitude for his clients, he told us an anecdote as to how once, having missed his usual train, he engaged a special train so as to be able to attend the court in the interest of his client. But Ranade, he said, towered above them all, as a versatile genius. He was not only a great judge, he was an equally great historian, an economist and a reformer. Although he was a judge, he fearlessly attended the Congress, and everyone had such confidence in his sagacity that they unquestioningly accepted his decisions. Gokhale's joy knew no bounds, as he described these qualities of head and heart which were all combined in his master.

Gokhale used to have a horse-carriage in those days. I did not know the circumstances that had made a

horse-carriage a necessity for him, and so I remonstrated with him: 'Can't you make use of the tramcar in going about from place to place? Is it derogatory to a leader's dignity?'

Slightly pained, he said, 'So you also have failed to understand me! I do not use my Council allowances for my own personal comforts. I envy your liberty to go about in tramcars, but I am sorry I cannot do likewise. When you are the victim of as wide a publicity as I am, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for you to go about in a tramcar. There is no reason to suppose that everything that the leaders do is with a view to personal comfort. I love your simple habits. I live as simply as I can, but some expense is almost inevitable for a man like myself.'

He thus satisfactorily disposed of one of my complaints, but there was another which he could not dispose of to my satisfaction.

'But you do not even go out for walks,' said I. 'Is it surprising that you should be always ailing? Should public work leave no time for physical exercise?'

'When do you ever find me free to go out for a walk?' he replied.

I had such a great regard for Gokhale that I never strove with him. Though this reply was far from satisfying me, I remained silent. I believed then and I believe even now, that, no matter what amount of work one has, one should always find some time for exercise, just as one does for one's meals. It is my humble opinion that, far from taking away from one's capacity for work, it adds to it.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part III, Chap. XVII*



## A MONTH WITH GOKHALE – II

Whilst living under Gokhale's roof I was far from being a stay-at-home.

I had told my Christian friends in South Africa that in India I would meet the Christian Indians and acquaint myself with their condition. I had heard of Babu Kalicharan Banerji and held him in high regard. He took a prominent part in the Congress, and I had none of the misgivings about him that I had about the average Christian Indian, who stood aloof from the Congress and isolated himself from Hindus and Musalmans. I told Gokhale that I was thinking of meeting him. He said: 'What is the good of your seeing him? He is a very good man, but I am afraid he will not satisfy you. I know him very well. However, you can certainly meet him if you like.'

I sought an appointment, which he readily gave me. When I went, I found that his wife was on her death-bed. His house was simple. In the Congress I had seen him in a coat and trousers, but I was glad to find him now wearing a Bengali *dhoti* and shirt. I liked his simple mode of dress, though I myself then wore a Parsi coat and trousers. Without much ado I presented my difficulties to him. He asked: 'Do you believe in the doctrine of original sin?'

'I do,' said I.

'Well then, Hinduism offers no absolution therefrom, Christianity does,' and added: 'The wages of sin is death, and the Bible says that the only way of deliverance is surrender unto Jesus.'

I put forward *Bhakti-marga* (the path of devotion) of the *Bhagavadgita*, but to no avail. I thanked him for his goodness. He failed to satisfy me, but I benefited by the interview.

During these days I walked up and down the streets of Calcutta. I went to most places on foot. I met Justice Mitter and Sir Gurudas Banerji, whose help I wanted in

my work in South Africa. And about this time I met Raja Sir Pyarimohan Mukarji.

Kalicharan Banerji had spoken to me about the Kali temple, which I was eager to see, especially as I had read about it in the books. So I went there one day. Justice Mitter's house was in the same locality, and I therefore went to the temple on the same day that I visited him. On the way I saw a stream of sheep going to be sacrificed to Kali. Rows of beggars lined the lane leading to the temple. There were religious mendicants too, and even in those days I was sternly opposed to giving alms to sturdy beggars. A crowd of them pursued me. One of such men was found seated on a verandah. He stopped me and accosted me : ' Whither are you going, my boy ? ' I replied to him.

He asked my companion and me to sit down, which we did.

I asked him : ' Do you regard this sacrifice as religion ? '

' Who would regard killing of animals as religion ? '

' Then, why don't you preach against it ? '

' That's not my business. Our business is to worship God. '

' But could you not find any other place in which to worship God ? '

' All places are equally good for us. The people are like a flock of sheep, following where leaders lead them. It is no business of us *sadhus*. '

We did not prolong the discussion but passed on to the temple. We were greeted by rivers of blood. I could not bear to stand there. I was exasperated and restless. ' I have never forgotten that sight. '

That very evening I had an invitation to dinner at a party of Bengali friends. There I spoke to a friend about this cruel form of worship. He said : ' The sheep don't feel anything. The noise and the drum-beating there deaden all sensation of pain. '

I could not swallow this. I told him that, if the sheep had speech, they would tell a different tale. I felt that the cruel custom ought to be stopped. I thought of the story of Buddha, but I also saw that the task was beyond my capacity.



I hold today the same opinion as I held then. To my mind the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man. But he who has not qualified himself for such service is unable to afford to it any protection. I must go through more self-purification and sacrifice, before I can hope to save these lambs from this unholy sacrifice. Today I think I must die pining for this self-purification and sacrifice. It is my constant prayer that there may be born on earth some great spirit, man or woman, fired with divine pity, who will deliver us from this heinous sin, save the lives of the innocent creatures, and purify the temple. How is it that Bengal with all its knowledge, intelligence, sacrifice, and emotion tolerates this slaughter?

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. XVIII

### A MONTH WITH GOKHALE—III

The terrible sacrifice offered to Kali in the name of religion enhanced my desire to know Bengali life. I had read and heard a good deal about the Brahmo Samaj. I knew something about the life of Pratap Chandra Mazumdar. I had attended some of the meetings addressed by him. I secured his life of Keshav Chandra Sen, read it with great interest, and understood the distinction between Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, and Adi Brahmo Samaj. I met Pandit Shivanath Shastri and in company with Prof. Kathavate went to see Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, but as no interviews with him were allowed then, we could not see him. We were, however, invited to a celebration of the Brahmo Samaj held at his place, and there we had the privilege of listening to fine Bengali music. Ever since I have been a lover of Bengali music.

Having seen enough of the Brahmo Samaj, it was impossible to be satisfied without seeing Swami Vivekanand.

So with great enthusiasm I went to Belur Math, mostly, or maybe all the way, on foot. I loved the sequestered site of the Math. I was disappointed and sorry to be told that the Swami was at his Calcutta house, lying ill, and could not be seen.

I then ascertained the place of residence of Sister Nivedita, and met her in a Chowringhee mansion. I was taken aback by the splendour that surrounded her, and even in our conversation there was not much meeting ground. I spoke to Gokhale about this, and he said he did not wonder that there could be no point of contact between me and a volatile\* person like her.

I met her again at Mr. Pestonji Padshah's place. I happened to come in just as she was talking to his old mother, and so I became an interpreter between the two. In spite of my failure to find any agreement with her, I could not but notice and admire her overflowing love for Hinduism. I came to know of her books later.

I used to divide my day between seeing the leading people in Calcutta regarding the work in South Africa, and visiting and studying the religious and public institutions of the city. I once addressed a meeting, presided over by Dr. Mullick, on the work of the Indian Ambulance Corps in the Boer War. My acquaintance with *The Englishman* stood me in good stead on this occasion too. Mr. Saunders was ill then, but rendered me as much help as in 1896. Gokhale liked this speech of mine, and he was very glad to hear Dr. Ray praising it.

Thus my stay under the roof of Gokhale made my work in Calcutta very easy, brought me into touch with the foremost Bengali families, and was the beginning of my intimate contact with Bengal.

I must needs skip over many a reminiscence of this memorable month. Let me simply mention my flying visit to Burma, and the *foongist*† there. I was pained by their lethargy. I saw the golden pagoda. I did not like the

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\* Regarding the use of the word 'volatile', see note 'In Justice to Her Memory', *Young India*, 30th June, 1927.

† Monks.



innumerable little candles burning in the temple, and the rats running about the sanctum brought to my mind thoughts of Swami Dayanand's experience at Morvi. The freedom and energy of the Burmese women charmed just as the indolence of the men pained me. I also saw, during my brief sojourn, that just as Bombay was not India, Rangoon was not Burma, and that just as we in India have become commission agents of English merchants, even so in Burma have we combined with the English merchants, in making the Burmese people our commission agents.

On my return from Burma I took leave of Gokhale. The separation was a wrench, but my work in Bengal, or rather Calcutta, was finished, and I had no occasion to stay any longer.

Before settling down I had thought of making a tour through India travelling third class, and of acquainting myself with the hardships of third class passengers. I spoke to Gokhale about this. To begin with he ridiculed the idea, but when I explained to him what I hoped to see, he cheerfully approved. I planned to go first to Benares to pay my respects to Mrs. Besant, who was then ill.

It was necessary to equip myself anew for the third class tour. Gokhale himself gave me a metal tiffin-box and got it filled with sweetballs and *puris*. I purchased a canvas bag worth twelve annas and a long coat made of Chhaya\* wool. The bag was to contain this coat, a *dhoti*, a towel and a shirt. I had a blanket as well to cover myself with and a water jug. Thus equipped I set forth on my travels. Gokhale and Dr. Ray came to the station to see me off. I had asked them both not to trouble to come, but they insisted. 'I should not have come if you had gone first class, but now I had to,' said Gokhale.

No one stopped Gokhale from going on to the platform. He was in his silk turban, jacket and *dhoti*. Dr. Ray was in his Bengali dress. He was stopped by the ticket collector, but on Gokhale telling him that he was his friend, he was admitted.

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\* A place in Porbandar State noted locally for its coarse woollen fabrics.

Thus with their good wishes I started on my journey.  
*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. XIX

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## IN BENARES

The journey was from Calcutta to Rajkot, and I planned to halt at Benares, Agra, Jaipur and Palanpur *en route*. I had not the time to see any more places than these. In each city I stayed one day and put up in *dharmashalas* or with *pandas*\* like the ordinary pilgrims, excepting at Palanpur. So far as I can remember, I did not spend more than Rs. 31 (including the train fare) on this journey.

In travelling third class I mostly preferred the ordinary to the mail trains, as I knew that the latter were more crowded and the fares in them higher.

The third class compartments are practically as dirty, and the closet arrangements as bad, today as they were then. There may be a little improvement now, but the difference between the facilities provided for the first and the third classes is out of all proportion to the difference between the fares for the two classes. Third class passengers are treated like sheep and their comforts are sheep's comforts. In Europe I travelled third—and only once first, just to see what it was like—but there I noticed no such difference between the first and the third classes. In South Africa third class passengers are mostly Negroes, yet the third class comforts are better there than here. In parts of South Africa third class compartments are provided with sleeping accommodation and cushioned seats. The accommodation is also regulated, so as to prevent overcrowding, whereas here I have found the regulation limit usually exceeded.

The indifference of the railway authorities to the comforts of the third class passengers, combined with the dirty and inconsiderate habits of the passengers themselves, makes third class travelling a trial for a passenger of cleanly ways. These unpleasant habits commonly include

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\* Priests.



throwing of rubbish on the floor of the compartment, smoking at all hours and in all places, betel and tobacco chewing, converting of the whole carriage into a spittoon, shouting and yelling, and using foul language, regardless of the convenience or comfort of fellow passengers. I have noticed little difference between my experience of the third class travelling in 1902 and that of my unbroken third class tours from 1915 to 1919.

I can think of only one remedy for this awful state of things—that educated men should make a point of travelling third class and reforming the habits of the people, as also of never letting the railway authorities rest in peace, sending in complaints wherever necessary, never resorting to bribes or any unlawful means for obtaining their own comforts, and never putting up with infringements of rules on the part of anyone concerned. This, I am sure, would bring about considerable improvement.

My serious illness in 1918-19 has unfortunately compelled me practically to give up third class travelling, and it has been a matter of constant pain and shame to me, especially because the disability came at a time when the agitation for the removal of the hardships of third class passengers was making fair headway. The hardships of poor railway and steamship passengers, accentuated by their bad habits, the undue facilities allowed by Government to foreign trade, and such other things, make an important group of subjects, worthy to be taken up by one or two enterprising and persevering workers who could devote their full time to it.

But I shall leave the third class passengers at that, and come to my experience in Benares. I arrived there in the morning. I had decided to put up with a *panda*. Numerous Brahmans surrounded me, as soon as I got out of the train, and I selected one who struck me to be comparatively cleaner and better than the rest. It proved to be a good choice. There was a cow in the courtyard of his house and an upper storey where I was given a lodging. I did not want to have any food without ablution in the Ganges in the proper orthodox manner. The *panda* made preparations for it. I had told him beforehand that on no account, could I

give him more than a rupee and four annas as *dakshina*\*, and that he should therefore keep this in mind while making the preparations.

The *panda* readily assented. 'Be the pilgrim rich or poor,' said he, 'the service is the same in every case. But the amount of *dakshina* we receive depends upon the will and the ability of the pilgrim.' I did not find that the *panda* at all abridged the usual formalities in my case. The *puja*† was over at twelve o'clock, and I went to the Kashi Vishvanath temple for *darshan*. I was deeply pained by what I saw there. When practising as a barrister in Bombay in 1891, I had occasion to attend a lecture on 'Pilgrimage to Kashi' in the Prarthana Samaj hall. I was therefore prepared for some measure of disappointment. But the actual disappointment was greater than I had bargained for.

The approach was through a narrow and slippery lane. Quiet there was none. The swarming flies and the noise made by the shopkeepers and pilgrims were perfectly insufferable.

Where one expected an atmosphere of meditation and communion, it was conspicuous by its absence. One had to seek that atmosphere in oneself. I did observe devout sisters, who were absorbed in meditation, entirely unconscious of the environment. But for this the authorities of the temple could scarcely claim any credit. The authorities should be responsible for creating and maintaining about the temple a pure, sweet and serene atmosphere, physical as well as moral. Instead of this I found a *bazar* where cunning shopkeepers were selling sweets and toys of the latest fashion.

When I reached the temple, I was greeted at the entrance by a stinking mass of rotten flowers. The floor was paved with fine marble, which was however broken by some devotee innocent of aesthetic taste who had set it with rupees serving as an excellent receptacle for dirt.

I went near the *Jnana-vapi* (Well of knowledge). I searched here for God but failed to find Him. I was not

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\* Gift.

† Worship.



therefore in a particularly good mood. The surroundings of the *Jnana-vapi* too I found to be dirty. I had no mind to give any *dakshina*. So I offered a pie. The *panda* in charge got angry and threw away the pie. He swore at me and said, 'This insult will take you straight to hell.'

This did not perturb me. 'Maharaj,' said I, 'whatever fate has in store for me, it does not behove one of your class to indulge in such language. You may take this pie if you like, or you will lose that too.'

'Go away,' he replied, 'I don't care for your pie.' And then followed a further volley of abuse.

I took up the pie and went my way, flattering myself that the Brahman had lost a pie and I had saved one. But the Maharaj was hardly the man to let the pie go. He called me back and said, 'All right, leave the pie here, I would rather not be as you are. If I refuse your pie, it will be bad for you.'

I silently gave him the pie and, with a sigh, went away.

Since then I have twice been to Kashi Vishvanath, but that has been after I had already been afflicted with the title of *Mahatma* and experiences such as I have detailed above had become impossible. People eager to have my *darshan* would not permit me to have a *darshan* of the temple. The woes of *Mahatmas* are known to *Mahatmas* alone. Otherwise the dirt and the noise were the same as before.

If anyone doubts the infinite mercy of God, let him have a look at these sacred places. How much hypocrisy and irreligion does the Prince of Yogis suffer to be perpetrated in His holy name? He proclaimed long ago:

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।

'Whatever a man sows, that shall he reap.' The law of Karma is inexorable and impossible of evasion. There is thus hardly any need for God to interfere. He laid down the law and, as it were, retired.

After this visit to the temple, I waited upon Mrs. Besant. I knew that she had just recovered from an illness. I sent in my name. She came at once. As I wished only to pay my respects to her, I said, 'I am aware that you are in delicate health. I only wanted to pay my respects. I am thankful that you have been good enough to receive

me in spite of your indifferent health. I will not detain you any longer.'

So saying, I took leave of her.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part III, Chap. XX

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## QUICKENED SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

I must turn to some other aspects of my life.

Up to now there had been in me a mixed desire. The spirit of self-sacrifice was tempered by the desire to lay by something for the future.

About the time I took up chambers in Bombay, an American insurance agent had come there—a man with a pleasing countenance and a sweet tongue. As though we were old friends he discussed my future welfare. 'All men of your status in America have their lives insured. Should you not also insure yourself against the future? Life is uncertain. We in America regard it as a religious obligation to get insured. Can I not tempt you to take out a small policy?'

Up to this time I had given the cold shoulder to all agents I had met in South Africa and India, for I had thought that life assurance implied fear and want of faith in God. But now I succumbed to the temptation of the American agent. As he proceeded with his argument, I had before my mind's eye a picture of my wife and children. 'Man, you have sold almost all the ornaments of your wife,' I said to myself. 'If something were to happen to you, the burden of supporting her and the children would fall on your poor brother, who has so nobly filled the place of father. How would that become you?' With these and similar arguments I persuaded myself to take out a policy for Rs. 10,000.

But when my mode of life changed in South Africa, my outlook changed too. All the steps I took at this time of trial were taken in the name of God and for His service. I did not know how long I should have to stay in South Africa. I had a fear that I might never be able to get back



to India; so I decided to keep my wife and children with me and earn enough to support them. This plan made me deplore the life policy and feel ashamed of having been caught in the net of the insurance agent. If, I said to myself, my brother is really in the position of my father, surely he would not consider it too much of a burden to support my widow, if it came to that. And what reason had I to assume that death would claim me earlier than the others? After all the real protector was neither I nor my brother, but the Almighty. In getting my life insured I had robbed my wife and children of their self-reliance. Why should they not be expected to take care of themselves? What happened to the families of the numberless poor in the world? Why should I not count myself as one of them?

A multitude of such thoughts passed through my mind, but I did not immediately act upon them. I recollect having paid at least one insurance premium in South Africa.

Outward circumstances too supported this train of thought. During my first sojourn in South Africa it was Christian influence that had kept alive in me the religious sense. Now it was theosophical influence that added strength to it. Mr. Ritch was a theosophist and put me in touch with the society at Johannesburg. I never became a member, as I had my differences, but I came in close contact with almost every theosophist. I had religious discussions with them every day. There used to be readings from theosophical books and sometimes I had occasion to address their meetings. The chief thing about theosophy is to cultivate and promote the idea of brotherhood. We had considerable discussion over this, and I criticized the members where their conduct did not appear to me to square with their ideal. The criticism was not without its wholesome effect on me. It led to introspection.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. IV*

## RESULT OF INTROSPECTION

When, in 1893, I came in close contact with Christian friends, I was a mere novice. They tried hard to bring home to me, and make me accept, the message of Jesus, and I was a humble and respectful listener with an open mind. At that time I naturally studied Hinduism to the best of my ability and endeavoured to understand other religions.

In 1903 the position was somewhat changed. Theosophist friends certainly intended to draw me into their society, but that was with a view to getting something from me as a Hindu. Theosophical literature is replete with Hindu influence, and so these friends expected that I should be helpful to them. I explained that my Samskrit study was not much to speak of, that I had not read the Hindu scriptures in the original, and that even my acquaintance with the translations was of the slightest. But being believers in *samskara* (tendencies caused by previous births) and *punarjanma* (rebirth), they assumed that I should be able to render at least some help. And so I felt like a Triton among the minnows. I started reading Swami Vivekananda's *Rajayoga* with some of these friends and M. N. Dvivedi's *Rajayoga* with others. I had to read Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* with one friend and the *Bhagavadgita* with quite a number. We formed a sort of Seekers' Club where we had regular readings. I already had faith in the Gita, which had a fascination for me. Now I realized the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Samskrit. I decided also to get by heart one or two verses every day. For this purpose I employed the time of my morning ablutions. The operation took me thirty-five minutes, fifteen minutes for the tooth brush and twenty for the bath. The first I used to do standing in western fashion. So on the wall opposite I stuck slips of paper on which were written the Gita verses and referred to them now and



then to help my memory. This time was found sufficient for memorizing the daily portion and recalling the verses already learnt. I remember having thus committed to memory thirteen chapters. But the memorizing of the Gita had to give way to other work and the creation and nurture of Satyagraha, which absorbed all my thinking time, as the latter may be said to be doing even now.

What effect this reading of the Gita had on my friends only they can say, but to me the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhava* (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had. My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of Equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly in the light of the Gita teaching the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the Gita teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude. I then wrote to Revashankarbhai to allow the insurance policy to lapse and get whatever could be recovered, or else to regard the premiums already paid as lost, for I had become convinced that God, who created my wife and children as well as myself, would take care of them. To my brother, who

had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future saving, if any, would be utilized for the benefit of the community.

I could not easily make my brother understand this. In stern language he explained to me my duty towards him. I should not, he said, aspire to be wiser than our father. I must support the family as he did. I pointed out to him that I was doing exactly what our father had done. The meaning of 'family' had but to be slightly widened and the wisdom of my step would become clear.

My brother gave me up and practically stopped all communication. I was deeply distressed, but it would have been a greater distress to give up what I considered to be my duty, and I preferred the lesser. But that did not affect my devotion to him, which remained as pure and great as ever. His great love for me was at the root of his misery. He did not so much want my money as that I should be well-behaved towards the family. Near the end of his life, however, he appreciated my view-point. When almost on his death-bed, he realized that my step had been right and wrote me a most pathetic letter. He apologized to me, if indeed a father may apologize to his son. He commended his sons to my care, to be brought up as I thought fit, and expressed his impatience to meet me. He cabled that he would like to come to South Africa and I cabled in reply that he could. But that was not to be. Nor could his desire as regards his sons be fulfilled. He died before he could start for South Africa. His sons had been brought up in the old atmosphere and could not change their course of life. I could not draw them to me. It was not their fault. 'Who can say thus far, no further, to the tide of his own nature?' Who can erase the impressions with which he is born? It is idle to expect one's children and wards necessarily to follow the same course of evolution as oneself.

This instance to some extent serves to show what a terrible responsibility it is to be a parent.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. V*



## A SACRIFICE TO VEGETARIANISM

As the ideals of sacrifice and simplicity were becoming more and more realized, and the religious consciousness was becoming more and more quickened in my daily life, the passion for vegetarianism as a mission went on increasing. I have known only one way of carrying on missionary work, *viz.*, by personal example and discussion with searchers for knowledge.

There was in Johannesburg a vegetarian restaurant conducted by a German who believed in Kuhne's hydro-pathic treatment. I visited the restaurant myself and helped it by taking English friends there. But I saw that it could not last as it was always in financial difficulties. I assisted it as much as I thought it deserved, and spent some money on it, but it had ultimately to be closed down.

Most theosophists are vegetarians more or less, and an enterprising lady belonging to that society now came upon the scene with a vegetarian restaurant on a grand scale. She was fond of art, extravagant and ignorant of accounts. Her circle of friends was fairly large. She had started in a small way, but later decided to extend the venture by taking large rooms, and asked me for help. I knew nothing of her finances when she thus approached me, but I took it that her estimate must be fairly accurate. And I was in a position to accommodate her. My clients used to keep large sums as deposits with me. Having received the consent of one of these clients, I lent about a thousand pounds from the amount to his credit. This client was most large-hearted and trusting. He had originally come to South Africa as an indentured labourer. He said: 'Give away the money, if you like. I know nothing in these matters. I only know you.' His name was Badri. He afterwards took a prominent part in Satyagraha, and suffered imprisonment as well. So I advanced the loan assuming that this consent was enough.

In two or three months' time I came to know that the amount would not be recovered. I could ill afford

to sustain such a loss. There were many other purposes to which I could have applied this amount. The loan was never repaid. But how could trusting Badri be allowed to suffer? He had known me only. I made good the loss.

A client friend to whom I spoke about this transaction sweetly chid me for my folly.

‘Bhai,’—I had fortunately not yet become ‘Mahatma’, nor even ‘Bapu’ (father), friends used to call me by the loving name of ‘Bhai’ (brother)—said he, ‘this was not for you to do. We depend upon you in so many things. You are not going to get back this amount. I know you will never allow Badri to come to grief, for you will pay him out of your pocket, but if you go on helping your reform schemes by operating on your clients’ money, the poor fellows will be ruined, and you will soon become a beggar. But you are our trustee and must know that, if you become a beggar, all our public work will come to a stop.’

The friend, I am thankful to say, is still alive. I have not yet come across a purer man than he, in South Africa or anywhere else. I have known him to apologize to people and to cleanse himself, when, having happened to suspect them, he had found his suspicion to be unfounded.

I saw that he had rightly warned me. For though I made good Badri’s loss, I should not have been able to meet any similar loss and should have been driven to incur debt—a thing I have never done in my life and always abhorred. I realized that even a man’s reforming zeal ought not to make him exceed his limits. I also saw that in thus lending trust-money I had disobeyed the cardinal teaching of the Gita, *viz.*, the duty of a man of equipoise to act without desire for the fruit. The error became for me a beaconlight of warning.

The sacrifice offered on the altar of vegetarianism was neither intentional nor expected. It was a virtue of necessity.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. VI*



## EXPERIMENTS IN EARTH AND WATER TREATMENT

With the growing simplicity of my life, my dislike for medicines steadily increased. While practising in Durban, I suffered for some time from debility and rheumatic inflammation. Dr. P. J. Mehta, who had come to see me, gave me treatment, and I got well. After that, up to the time when I returned to India, I do not remember having suffered from any ailment to speak of.

But I used to be troubled with constipation and frequent headaches, while at Johannesburg. I kept myself fit with occasional laxatives and a well-regulated diet. But I could hardly call myself healthy, and always wondered when I should get free from the incubus of these laxative medicines.

About this time I read of the formation of a 'No Breakfast Association' in Manchester. The argument of the promoters was that Englishmen ate too often and too much, that their doctors' bills were heavy because they ate until midnight, and that they should at least give up breakfast, if they wanted to improve this state of affairs. Though all these things could not be said of me, I felt that the argument did partly apply in my case. I used to have three square meals daily in addition to afternoon tea. I was never a spare eater and enjoyed as many delicacies as could be had with a vegetarian and spiceless diet. I scarcely ever got up before six or seven. I therefore argued that, if I also dropped the morning breakfast, I might become free from headaches. So I tried the experiment. For a few days it was rather hard, but the headaches entirely disappeared. This led me to conclude that I was eating more than I needed.

But the change was far from relieving me of constipation. I tried Kuhne's hipbaths, which gave some relief but did not completely cure me. In the meantime the German who had a vegetarian restaurant, or some other friend, I forget who, placed in my hands Just's *Return to*

*Nature.* In this book I read about earth treatment. The author also advocated fresh fruit and nuts as the natural diet of man. I did not at once take to the exclusive fruit diet, but immediately began experiments in earth treatment, and with wonderful results. The treatment consisted in applying to the abdomen a bandage of clean earth moistened with cold water and spread like a poultice on fine linen. This I applied at bed time, removing it during the night or in the morning, whenever I happened to wake up. It proved a radical cure. Since then I have tried the treatment on myself and my friends and never had reason to regret it. In India I have not been able to try this treatment with equal confidence. For one thing, I have never had time to settle down in one place to conduct the experiments. But my faith in the earth and water treatment remains practically the same as before. Even today I give myself the earth treatment to a certain extent and recommend it to my co-workers, whenever occasion arises.

Though I have had two serious illnesses in my life, I believe that man has little need to drug himself. 999 cases out of a thousand can be brought round by means of a well-regulated diet, water and earth treatment and similar household remedies. He who runs to the doctor, *vaidya* or *hakim* for every little ailment, and swallows all kinds of vegetable and mineral drugs, not only curtails his life, but, by becoming the slave of his body instead of remaining its master, loses self-control, and ceases to be a man.

Let no one discount these observations because they are being written in a sickbed. I know the reasons for my illnesses. I am fully conscious that I alone am responsible for them, and it is because of that consciousness that I have not lost patience. In fact I have thanked God for them as lessons and successfully resisted the temptation of taking numerous drugs. I know my obstinacy often tries my doctors, but they kindly bear with me and do not give me up.

However, I must not digress. Before proceeding further, I should give the reader a word of warning. Those who purchase Just's book on the strength of this chapter should not take everything in it to be gospel truth. A writer almost always presents one aspect of a case, whereas every



case can be seen from no less than seven points of view, all of which are probably correct by themselves, but not correct at the same time and in the same circumstances. And then many books are written with a view to gaining customers and earning name and fame. Let those, therefore, who read such books as these do so with discernment, and take advice of some experienced man before trying any of the experiments set forth, or let them read the books with patience and digest them thoroughly before acting upon them.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. VII

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## A WARNING

I am afraid I must continue the digression until the next chapter. Along with my experiments in earth treatment, those in dietetics were also being carried on, and it may not be out of place here to make a few observations as regards the latter, though I shall have occasion to refer to them again later.

I may not, now or hereafter, enter into a detailed account of the experiments in dietetics, for I did so in a series of Gujarati articles which appeared years ago in *Indian Opinion*, and which were afterwards published in the form of a book popularly known in English as *A Guide to Health*.\* Among my little books this has been the most widely read alike in the East and in the West, a thing that I have not yet been able to understand. It was written for the benefit of the readers of *Indian Opinion*. But I know that the booklet has profoundly influenced the lives of many, both in the East and in the West, who have never seen *Indian Opinion*. For they have been corresponding with me on the subject. It has therefore appeared necessary to say something here about the booklet, for though I see no reason to alter the views set forth in it, yet I have made certain radical changes in my actual practice, of which

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\* Published under the new title *Key to Health*. Navajivan Publishing House; Price 0.50 nP., Postage etc. 0.25 nP.

all readers of the book do not know, and of which, I think, they should be informed.

The booklet was written, like all my other writings, with a spiritual end, which has always inspired every one of my actions, and therefore it is a matter for deep distress to me that I am unable today to practise some of the theories propounded in the book.

It is my firm conviction that man need take no milk at all, beyond the mother's milk that he takes as a baby. His diet should consist of nothing but sunbaked fruits and nuts. He can secure enough nourishment both for the tissues and the nerves from fruits like grapes and nuts like almonds. Restraint of the sexual and other passions becomes easy for a man who lives on such food. My co-workers and I have seen by experience that there is much truth in the Indian proverb that as a man eats, so shall he become. These views have been set out elaborately in the book.

But unfortunately in India I have found myself obliged to deny some of my theories in practice. Whilst I was engaged on the recruiting campaign in Kheda, an error in diet laid me low, and I was at death's door. I tried in vain to rebuild a shattered constitution without milk. I sought the help of the doctors, *vaidyas* and scientists whom I knew, to recommend a substitute for milk. Some suggested *mung* water, some *mowhra* oil, some almond-milk. I wore out my body in experimenting on these, but nothing could help me to leave the sickbed. The *vaidyas* read verses to me from Charaka to show that religious scruples about diet have no place in therapeutics. So they could not be expected to help me to continue to live without milk. And how could those who recommended beef-tea and brandy without hesitation help me to preserve with a milkless diet?

I might not take cow's or buffalo's milk, as I was bound by a vow. The vow of course meant the giving up of all milks, but as I had mother cow's and mother buffalo's only in mind when I took the vow, and as I wanted to live, I somehow beguiled myself into emphasizing the letter of the vow and decided to take goat's milk. I was fully conscious, when I started taking mother goat's milk, that the spirit of my vow was destroyed.



But the idea of leading a campaign against the Rowlatt Act had possessed me. And with it grew the desire to live. Consequently one of the greatest experiments in my life came to a stop.

I know it is argued that the soul has nothing to do with what one eats or drinks, as the soul neither eats nor drinks; that it is not what you put inside from without, but what you express outwardly from within, that matters. There is no doubt some force in this. But rather than examine this reasoning, I shall content myself with merely declaring my firm conviction that, for the seeker who would live in fear of God and who would see Him face to face, restraint in diet both as to quantity and quality is as essential as restraint in thought and speech.

In a matter, however, where my theory has failed me, I should not only give the information, but issue a grave warning against adopting it. I would therefore urge those who, on the strength of the theory propounded by me, may have given up milk, not to persist in the experiment, unless they find it beneficial in every way, or unless they are advised by experienced physicians. Up to now my experience here has shown me that for those with a weak digestion and for those who are confined to bed there is no light and nourishing diet equal to that of milk.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. VIII

## A SACRED RECOLLECTION AND PENANCE

A variety of incidents in my life have conspired to bring me in close contact with people of many creeds and many communities, and my experience with all of them warrants the statement that I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinctions. I cannot claim this as a special virtue, as it is in my very nature, rather than a result of any effort on my part, whereas in the case of *ahimsa* (non-violence),

*brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession) and other cardinal virtues, I am fully conscious of a continuous striving for their cultivation.

When I was practising in Durban, my office clerks often stayed with me, and there were among them Hindus and Christians, or to describe them by their provinces, Gujaratis and Tamilians. I do not recollect having ever regarded them as anything but my kith and kin. I treated them as members of my family, and had unpleasantness with my wife if ever she stood in the way of my treating them as such. One of the clerks was a Christian, born of Panchama parents.

The house was built after the Western model and the rooms rightly had no outlets for dirty water. Each room had therefore chamber-pots. Rather than have these cleaned by a servant or a sweeper, my wife or I attended to them. The clerks who made themselves completely at home would naturally clean their own pots, but the Christian clerk was a newcomer, and it was our duty to attend to his bedroom. My wife managed the pots of the others, but to clean those used by one who had been a Panchama seemed to her to be the limit, and we fell out. She could not bear the pots being cleaned by me, neither did she like doing it herself. Even today I can recall the picture of her chiding me, her eyes red with anger, and pearl drops streaming down her cheeks, as she descended the ladder, pot in hand. But I was a cruelly kind husband. I regarded myself as her teacher, and so harassed her out of my blind love for her.

I was far from being satisfied by her merely carrying the pot. I would have her do it cheerfully. So I said, raising my voice: 'I will not stand this nonsense in my house.'

The words pierced her like an arrow.

She shouted back: 'Keep your house to yourself and let me go.' I forgot myself, and the spring of compassion dried up in me. I caught her by the hand, dragged the helpless woman to the gate, which was just opposite the ladder, and proceeded to open it with the intention of pushing her out. The tears were running down her cheeks in torrents, and she cried: 'Have you no sense of shame? Must you so



far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives here to harbour me. Being your wife, you think I must put up with your cuffs and kicks? For Heaven's sake behave yourself, and shut the gate. Let us not be found making scenes like this!

I put on a brave face, but was really ashamed and shut the gate. If my wife could not leave me, neither could I leave her. We have had numerous bickerings, but the end has always been peace between us. The wife, with her matchless powers of endurance, has always been the victor.

Today I am in a position to narrate the incident with some detachment, as it belongs to a period out of which I have fortunately emerged. I am no longer a blind, infatuated husband, I am no more my wife's teacher. Kasturba can, if she will, be as unpleasant to me today, as I used to be to her before. We are tried friends, the one no longer regarding the other as the object of lust. She has been a faithful nurse throughout my illnesses, serving without any thought of reward.

The incident in question occurred in 1898, when I had no conception of *brahmacharya*. It was a time when I thought that the wife was the object of her husband's lust, born to do her husband's behest, rather than a help-mate, a comrade and a partner in the husband's joys and sorrows.

It was in the year 1900 that these ideas underwent a radical transformation, and in 1906 they took concrete shape. But of this I propose to speak in its proper place. Suffice it to say that with the gradual disappearance in me of the carnal appetite, my domestic life became and is becoming more and more peaceful, sweet and happy.

Let no one conclude from this narrative of a sacred recollection that we are by any means an ideal couple, or that there is a complete identity of ideals between us. Kasturba herself does not perhaps know whether she has any ideals independently of me. It is likely that many of my doings have not her approval even today. We never discuss them, I see no good in discussing them. For she was educated neither by her parents nor by me at the time when I ought to have done it. But she is blessed with one great

quality to a very considerable degree; a quality which most Hindu wives possess in some measure. And it is this: willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, she has considered herself blessed in following in my footsteps, and has never stood in the way of my endeavour to lead a life of restraint. Though, therefore, there is a wide difference between us intellectually, I have always had the feeling that ours is a life of contentment, happiness and progress.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. X

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## THE MAGIC SPELL OF A BOOK

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I made the acquaintance of Mr. Polak in the vegetarian restaurant, just as I had made that of Mr. West. One evening a young man dining at a table a little way off sent me his card expressing a desire to see me. I invited him to come to my table, which he did.

‘I am sub-editor of *The Critic*,’ he said. ‘When I read your letter to the press about the plague, I felt a strong desire to see you. I am glad to have this opportunity.’

Mr. Polak’s candour drew me to him. The same evening we got to know each other. We seemed to hold closely similar views on the essential things of life. He liked simple life. He had a wonderful faculty of translating into practice anything that appealed to his intellect. Some of the changes that he had made in his life were as prompt as they were radical.

*Indian Opinion* was getting more and more expensive every day. The very first report from Mr. West was alarming. He wrote: ‘I do not expect the concern to yield the profit that you had thought probable. I am afraid there may be even a loss. The books are not in order. There are heavy arrears to be recovered, but one cannot make head or tail of them. Considerable overhauling will have to be done. But all this need not alarm you. I shall try to put things right as best I can. I remain on, whether there is profit or not.’



Mr. West might have left when he discovered that there was no profit, and I could not have blamed him. In fact, he had a right to arraign me for having described the concern as profitable without proper proof. But he never so much as uttered one word of complaint. I have, however, an impression that this discovery led Mr. West to regard me as credulous. I had simply accepted Sjt. Madanjit's estimate without caring to examine it, and told Mr. West to expect a profit.

I now realize that a public worker should not make statements of which he has not made sure. Above all, a votary of truth must exercise the greatest caution. To allow a man to believe a thing which one has not fully verified is to compromise truth. I am pained to have to confess that, in spite of this knowledge, I have not quite conquered my credulous habit, for which my ambition to do more work than I can manage is responsible. This ambition has often been a source of worry more to my co-workers than to myself.

On receipt of Mr. West's letter I left for Natal. I had taken Mr. Polak into my fullest confidence. He came to see me off at the station, and left with me a book to read during the journey, which he said I was sure to like. It was Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.

The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty-four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.

This was the first book of Ruskin I had ever read. During the days of my education I had read practically nothing outside text-books, and after I launched into active life I had very little time for reading. I cannot therefore claim much book knowledge. However, I believe I have not lost much because of this enforced restraint. On the contrary, the limited reading may be said to have enabled me thoroughly to digest what I did read. Of these books, the one that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was *Unto This Last*. I

translated it later into Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodaya* (the welfare of all).

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure.

The teachings of *Unto This Last* I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life of labour, *i.e.*, the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. *Unto This Last* made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. XVIII

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### THE PHŒNIX SETTLEMENT

I talked over the whole thing with Mr. West, described to him the effect *Unto This Last* had produced on my mind, and proposed that *Indian Opinion* should be removed to a farm, on which everyone should labour, drawing the same living wage, and attending to the press work in spare time. Mr. West approved of the proposal, and £3 was laid down as the monthly allowance per head, irrespective of colour or nationality.

But it was a question whether all the ten or more workers in the press would agree to go and settle on an out-of-the-way farm, and be satisfied with bare maintenance. We therefore proposed that those who could not fit in with the scheme should continue to draw their salaries and



gradually try to reach the ideal of becoming members of the settlement.

I talked to the workers in the terms of this proposal. It did not appeal to Sjt. Madanjit, who considered my proposal to be foolish and held that it would ruin a venture on which he had staked his all; that the workers would bolt, *Indian Opinion* would come to a stop, and the press would have to be closed down.

Among the men working in the press was Chhaganlal Gandhi, one of my cousins. I had put the proposal to him at the same time as to West. He had a wife and children, but he had from childhood chosen to be trained and to work under me. He had full faith in me. So without any argument he agreed to the scheme and has been with me ever since. The machinist Govindaswami also fell in with the proposal. The rest did not join the scheme, but agreed to go wherever I removed the press.

I do not think I took more than two days to fix up these matters with the men. Thereafter I at once advertised for a piece of land situated near a railway station in the vicinity of Durban. An offer came in respect of Phoenix. Mr. West and I went to inspect the estate. Within a week we purchased twenty acres of land. It had a nice little spring and a few orange and mango trees. Adjoining it was a piece of 80 acres which had many more fruit trees and a dilapidated cottage. We purchased this too, the total cost being a thousand pounds.

The late Mr. Rustomji always supported me in such enterprises. He liked the project. He placed at my disposal second-hand corrugated iron sheets of a big godown and other building material, with which we started work. Some Indian carpenters and masons, who had worked with me in the Boer War, helped me in erecting a shed for the press. This structure, which was 75 feet long and 30 feet broad, was ready in less than a month. Mr. West and others, at great personal risk, stayed with the carpenters and masons. The place, uninhabited and thickly overgrown with grass, was infested with snakes and obviously dangerous to live in. At first all lived under canvas. We carted most of our things to Phoenix in about a week.

It was fourteen miles from Durban, and two and a half miles from Phoenix station.

Only one issue of *Indian Opinion* had to be printed outside, in the Mercury press.

I now endeavoured to draw to Phoenix those relations and friends who had come with me from India to try their fortune, and who were engaged in business of various kinds. They had come in search of wealth, and it was therefore difficult to persuade them; but some agreed. Of these I can single out here only Maganlal Gandhi's name. The others went back to business. Maganlal Gandhi left his business for good to cast in his lot with me, and by ability, sacrifice and devotion stands foremost among my original co-workers in my ethical experiments. As a self-taught handicraftsman his place among them is unique.

Thus the Phoenix Settlement was started in 1904.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. XIX

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## POLAK TAKES THE PLUNGE

It has always been my regret that, although I started the Settlement at Phoenix, I could stay there only for brief periods. My original idea had been gradually to retire from practice, go and live at the Settlement, earn my livelihood by manual work there, and find the joy of service in the fulfilment of Phoenix. But it was not to be. I have found by experience that man makes his plans to be often upset by God, but, at the same time where the ultimate goal is the search of truth, no matter how a man's plans are frustrated, the issue is never injurious and often better than anticipated. The unexpected turn that Phoenix took and the unexpected happenings were certainly not injurious, though it is difficult to say that they were better than our original expectations.

In order to enable every one of us to make a living by manual labour, we parcelled out the land round the press in pieces of three acres each. One of these fell to my lot. On all these plots we, much against our wish, built



houses with corrugated iron. Our desire had been to have mud huts thatched with straw or small brick houses such as would become ordinary peasants, but it could not be. They would have been more expensive and would have meant more time, and everyone was eager to settle down as soon as possible.

The editor was still Mansukhlal Nazar. He had not accepted the new scheme and was directing the paper from Durban where there was a branch office for *Indian Opinion*. Though we had paid compositors, the idea was for every member of the Settlement to learn type-setting, the easiest, if the most tedious, of the processes in a printing press. Those, therefore, who did not already know the work learnt it. I remained a dunce to the last. Maganlal Gandhi surpassed us all. Though he had never before worked in a press, he became an expert compositor and not only achieved great speed but, to my agreeable surprise, quickly mastered all the other branches of press work. I have always thought that he was not conscious of his own capacity.

We had hardly settled down, the buildings were hardly ready, when I had to leave the newly constructed nest and go to Johannesburg. I was not in a position to allow the work there to remain without attention for any length of time.

On return to Johannesburg, I informed Polak of the important changes I had made. His joy knew no bounds when he learnt that the loan of his book had been so fruitful. 'Is it not possible,' he asked, 'for me to take part in the new venture?' 'Certainly,' said I. 'You may if you like to join the Settlement.' 'I am quite ready,' he replied, 'if you will admit me.'

His determination captured me. He gave a month's notice to his chief to be relieved from *The Critic*, and reached Phoenix in due course. By his sociability he won the hearts of all and soon became a member of the family. Simplicity was so much a part of his nature that, far from feeling the life at Phoenix in any way strange or hard, he took to it like a duck takes to water. But I could not keep him there long. Mr. Ritch had decided to

finish his legal studies in England, and it was impossible for me to bear the burden of the office single-handed, so I suggested to Polak that he should join the office and qualify as an attorney. I had thought that ultimately both of us would retire and settle at Phoenix, but that never came to pass. Polak's was such a trustful nature that, when he reposed his confidence in a friend, he would try to agree with him instead of arguing with him. He wrote to me from Phoenix that though he loved the life there, was perfectly happy, and had hopes of developing the Settlement, still he was ready to leave and join the office to qualify as an attorney, if I thought that thereby we should more quickly realize our ideals. I heartily welcomed the letter. Polak left Phoenix, came to Johannesburg and signed his articles with me.

About the same time a Scotch theosophist, whom I had been coaching for a local legal examination, also joined as an articled clerk, on my inviting him to follow Polak's example. His name was Mr. MacIntyre.

Thus, with the laudable object of quickly realizing the ideals at Phoenix, I seemed to be going deeper and deeper into a contrary current, and had God not willed otherwise, I should have found myself entrapped in this net spread in the name of simple life.

It will be after a few more chapters that I shall describe how I and my ideals were saved in a way no one had imagined or expected.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. XXI*



## WHOM GOD PROTECTS

I had now given up all hope of returning to India in the near future. I had promised my wife that I would return home within a year. The year was gone without any prospect of my return, so I decided to send for her and the children.

On the boat bringing them to South Africa, Ramdas, my third son, broke his arm while playing with the ship's captain. The captain looked after him well and had him attended to by the ship's doctor. Ramdas landed with his hand in a sling. The doctor had advised that, as soon as we reached home, the wound should be dressed by a qualified doctor. But this was the time when I was full of faith in my experiments in earth treatment. I had even succeeded in persuading some of my clients who had faith in my quackery to try the earth and water treatment.

What then was I to do for Ramdas? He was just eight years old. I asked him if he would mind my dressing his wound. With a smile he said he did not mind at all. It was not possible for him at that age to decide what was the best thing for him, but he knew very well the distinction between quackery and proper medical treatment. And he knew my habit of home treatment and had faith enough to trust himself to me. In fear and trembling I undid the bandage, washed the wound, applied a clean earth poultice and tied the arm up again. This sort of dressing went on daily for about a month until the wound was completely healed. There was no hitch, and the wound took no more time to heal than the ship's doctor had said it would under the usual treatment.

This and other experiments enhanced my faith in such household remedies, and I now proceeded with them with more self-confidence. I widened the sphere of their application, trying the earth and water and fasting treatment in cases of wounds, fevers, dyspepsia, jaundice and other complaints, with success on most occasions. But nowadays I have not the confidence I had in South Africa and

experience has even shown that these experiments involve obvious risks.

The reference here, therefore, to these experiments is not meant to demonstrate their success. I cannot claim complete success for any experiment. Even medical men can make no such claim for their experiments. My object is only to show that he who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That leads to a quicker discovery of truth, and God always protects the honest experimenter.

The risks involved in experiments in cultivating intimate contacts with Europeans were as grave as those in the nature cure experiments. Only those risks were of a different kind. But in cultivating those contacts I never so much as thought of the risks.

I invited Polak to come and stay with me, and we began to live like blood brothers. The lady who was soon to be Mrs. Polak and he had been engaged for some years, but the marriage had been postponed for a propitious time. I have an impression that Polak wanted to put some money by before he settled down to a married life. He knew Ruskin much better than I, but his Western surroundings were a bar against his translating Ruskin's teaching immediately into practice. But I pleaded with him: 'When there is a heart union, as in your case, it is hardly right to postpone marriage merely for financial considerations. If poverty is a bar, poor men can never marry. And then you are now staying with me. There is no question of household expenses. I think you should get married as soon as possible.' As I have said in a previous chapter, I had never to argue a thing twice with Polak. He appreciated the force of my argument, and immediately opened correspondence on the subject with Mrs. Polak, who was then in England. She gladly accepted the proposal and in a few months reached Johannesburg. Any expense over the wedding was out of the question, not even a special dress was thought necessary. They needed no religious rites to seal the bond. Mrs. Polak was a Christian by birth and Polak a Jew. Their common religion was the religion of ethics.



I may mention in passing an amusing incident in connection with this wedding. The Registrar of European marriages in the Transvaal could not register marriages between black or coloured people. In the wedding in question, I acted as the best man. Not that we could not have got a European friend for the purpose, but Polak would not brook the suggestion. So we three went to the Registrar of marriages. How could he be sure that the parties to a marriage in which I acted as the best man would be whites? He proposed to postpone registration pending inquiries. The next day was a Sunday. The day following was New Year's Day, a public holiday. To postpone the date of a solemnly arranged wedding on such a flimsy pretext was more than one could put up with. I knew the Chief Magistrate, who was head of the Registration Department. So I appeared before him with the couple. He laughed and gave me a note to the Registrar and the marriage was duly registered.

Up to now the Europeans living with us had been more or less known to me before. But now an English lady who was an utter stranger to us entered the family. I do not remember our ever having had a difference with the newly married couple, but even if Mrs. Polak and my wife had had some unpleasant experiences, they would have been no more than what happen in the best regulated homogeneous families. And let it be remembered that mine would be considered an essentially heterogeneous family, where people of all kinds and temperaments were freely admitted. When we come to think of it, the distinction between heterogeneous and homogeneous is discovered to be merely imaginary. We are all one family.

I had better celebrate West's wedding also in this chapter. At this stage of my life, my ideas about *brahmacharya* had not fully matured, and so I was interesting myself in getting all my bachelor friends married. When, in due course, West made a pilgrimage to Louth to see his parents, I advised him to return married if possible. Phoenix was the common home, and as we were all supposed to have become farmers, we were not afraid of marriage and its usual consequences. West returned with

Mrs. West, a beautiful young lady from Leicester. She came of a family of shoemakers working in a Leicester factory. Mrs. West had herself some experience of work in this factory. I have called her beautiful, because it was her moral beauty that at once attracted me. True beauty after all consists in purity of heart. With Mr. West had come his mother-in-law too. The old lady is still alive. She put us all to shame by her industry and her buoyant, cheerful nature.

In the same way as I persuaded these European friends to marry, I encouraged the Indian friends to send for their families from home. Phoenix thus developed into a little village, half a dozen families having come and settled and begun to increase there.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. XXII*

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## A PEEP INTO THE HOUSEHOLD

It has already been seen that, though household expenses were heavy, the tendency towards simplicity began in Durban. But the Johannesburg house came in for much severer overhauling in the light of Ruskin's teaching.

I introduced as much simplicity as was possible in a barrister's house. It was impossible to do without a certain amount of furniture. The change was more internal than external. The liking for doing personally all the physical labour increased. I therefore began to bring my children also under that discipline.

Instead of buying baker's bread, we began to prepare unleavened wholemeal bread at home according to Kuhne's recipe. Common mill flour was no good for this, and the use of handground flour, it was thought, would ensure more simplicity, health and economy. So I purchased a hand-mill for £ 7. The iron wheel was too heavy to be tackled by one man, but easy for two. Polak and I and the children usually worked it. My wife also occasionally lent a hand, though the grinding hour was her usual time for commencing kitchen work. Mrs. Polak now joined us



on her arrival. The grinding proved a very beneficial exercise for the children. Neither this nor any other work was ever imposed on them, but it was a pastime to them to come and lend a hand, and they were at liberty to break off whenever tired. But the children, including those whom I shall have occasion to introduce later, as a rule never failed me. Not that I had no laggards at all, but most did their work cheerfully enough. I can recall few youngsters in those days fighting shy of work or pleading fatigue.

We had engaged a servant to look after the house. He lived with us as a member of the family, and the children used to help him in his work. The municipal sweeper removed the night-soil, but we personally attended to the cleaning of the closet instead of asking or expecting the servant to do it. This proved as good training for the children. The result was that none of my sons developed any aversion for scavenger's work, and they naturally got a good grounding in general sanitation. There was hardly any illness in the home at Johannesburg, but whenever there was any, the nursing was willingly done by the children. I will not say that I was indifferent to their literary education, but I certainly did not hesitate to sacrifice it. My sons have therefore some reason for a grievance against me. Indeed they have occasionally given expression to it, and I must plead guilty to a certain extent. The desire to give them a literary education was there. I even endeavoured to give it to them myself, but every now and then there was some hitch or other. As I had made no other arrangement for their private tuition, I used to get them to walk with me daily to the office and back home—a distance of about 5 miles in all. This gave them and me a fair amount of exercise. I tried to instruct them by conversation during these walks, if there was no one else claiming my attention. All my children, excepting the eldest, Harilal, who had stayed away in India, were brought up in Johannesburg in this manner. Had I been able to devote at least an hour to their literary education with strict regularity, I should have given them, in my opinion, an ideal education.

But it has been their, as also my, regret that I failed to ensure them enough literary training. The eldest son has often given vent to his distress privately before me and publicly in the press; the other sons have generously forgiven the failure as unavoidable. I am not heart-broken over it and the regret, if any, is that I did not prove an ideal father. But I hold that I sacrificed their literary training to what I genuinely, though may be wrongly, believed to be service to the community. I am quite clear that I have not been negligent in doing whatever was needful for building up their character. I believe it is the bounden duty of every parent to provide for this properly. Whenever, in spite of my endeavour, my sons have been found wanting, it is my certain conviction that they have reflected, not want of care on my part, but the defects of both their parents.

Children inherit the qualities of the parents, no less than their physical features. Environment does play an important part, but the original capital on which a child starts in life is inherited from its ancestors. I have also seen children successfully surmounting the effects of an evil inheritance. That is due to purity being an inherent attribute of the soul.

Polak and I had often very heated discussions about the desirability or otherwise of giving the children an English education. It has always been my conviction that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country. Having these convictions, I made a point of always talking to my children in Gujarati. Polak never liked this. He thought I was spoiling their future. He contended, with all the vigour and love at his command, that, if children were to learn a universal language like English from their infancy, they would easily gain considerable advantage over others in the race of life. He failed to convince me. I do not now remember whether I convinced him of the correctness of my attitude, or whether he gave me



up as too obstinate. This happened about twenty years ago, and my convictions have deepened with experience. Though my sons have suffered for want of full literary education, the knowledge of the mother tongue that they naturally acquired has been all to their and the country's good, inasmuch as they do not appear the foreigners they would otherwise have appeared. They naturally become bilingual, speaking and writing English with fair ease, because of daily contact with a large circle of English friends, and because of their stay in a country where English was the chief language spoken.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part IV, Chap. XXIII*

## HEART SEARCHINGS

The Zulu 'rebellion' was full of new experiences and gave me much food for thought. The Boer War had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the 'rebellion' did. This was no war but a man-hunt, not only in my opinion, but also in that of many Englishmen with whom I had occasion to talk. To hear every morning reports of the soldiers' rifles exploding like crackers in innocent hamlets, and to live in the midst of them was a trial. But I swallowed the bitter draught, especially as the work of my Corps consisted only in nursing the wounded Zulus. I could see that but for us the Zulus would have been uncared for. This work, therefore, eased my conscience.

But there was much else to set one thinking. It was a sparsely populated part of the country. Few and far between in hills and dales were the scattered Kraals of the simple and so-called 'uncivilized' Zulus. Marching, with or without the wounded, through these solemn solitudes, I often fell into deep thought.

I pondered over *brahmacharya* and its implications, and my convictions took deep root. I discussed it with my co-workers. I had not realized then how indispensable it was for self-realization, but I clearly saw that one aspiring

to serve humanity with his whole soul could not do without it. It was borne in upon me that I should have more and more occasions for service of the kind I was rendering, and that I should find myself unequal to my task if I were engaged in the pleasures of family life and in the propagation and rearing of children.

In a word, I could not live both after the flesh and the spirit. On the present occasion, for instance, I should not have been able to throw myself into the fray, had my wife been expecting a baby. Without the observance of *brahmacharya* service of the family would be inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent.

So thinking, I became somewhat impatient to take a final vow. The prospect of the vow brought a certain kind of exultation. Imagination also found free play and opened out limitless vistas of service.

Whilst I was thus in the midst of strenuous physical and mental work, a report came to the effect that the work of suppressing the 'rebellion' was nearly over, and that we should soon be discharged. A day or two after this our discharge came and in a few days we got back to our homes.

After a short while I got a letter from the Governor specially thanking the Ambulance Corps for its services.

On my arrival at Phoenix I eagerly broached the subject of *brahmacharya* with Chhaganlal, Maganlal, West and others. They liked the idea and accepted the necessity of taking the vow, but they also represented the difficulties of the task. Some of them set themselves bravely to observe it, and some, I know, succeeded also.

I too took the plunge—the vow to observe *brahmacharya* for life. I must confess that I had not then fully realized the magnitude and immensity of the task I undertook. The difficulties are even today staring me in the face. The importance of the vow is being more and more borne in upon me. Life without *brahmacharya* appears to me to be insipid and animal-like. The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint. What formerly



appeared to me to be extravagant praise of *brahmacharya* in our religious books seems now, with increasing clearness every day, to be absolutely proper and founded on experience.

I saw that *brahmacharya*, which is so full of wonderful potency, is by no means an easy affair, and certainly not a mere matter of the body. It begins with bodily restraint, but does not end there. The perfection of it precludes even an impure thought. A true *brahmachari* will not even dream of satisfying the fleshy appetite, and until he is in that condition, he has a great deal of ground to cover.

For me the observance of even bodily *brahmacharya* has been full of difficulties. Today I may say that I feel myself fairly safe, but I have yet to achieve complete mastery over thought, which is so essential. Not that the will or effort is lacking, but it is yet a problem to me wherefrom undesirable thoughts spring their insidious invasions. I have no doubt that there is a key to lock out undesirable thoughts, but every one has to find it out for himself. Saints and seers have left their experiences for us, but they have given us no infallible and universal prescription. For perfection or freedom from error comes only from grace, and so seekers after God have left us *mantras*, such as *Ramanama*, hallowed by their own austerities and charged with their purity. Without an unreserved surrender to His grace, complete mastery over thought is impossible. This is the teaching of every great book of religion, and I am realizing the truth of it every moment of my striving after that perfect *brahmacharya*.

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Thus *brahmacharya*, which I had been observing willy-nilly since 1900, was sealed with a vow in the middle of 1906.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part IV, Chap. XXV

## KUMBHA MELA

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This year—1915—was the year of the Kumbha fair, which is held at Hardvar once every 12 years. I was by no means eager to attend the fair, but I was anxious to meet Mahatma Munshiramji who was in his Gurukul. Gokhale's Society had sent a big volunteer corps for service at the Kumbha. Pandit Hridayanath Kunzru was at the head, and the late Dr. Dev was the medical officer. I was invited to send the Phoenix party to assist them, and so Maganlal Gandhi had already preceded me. On my return from Rangoon, I joined the band.

The journey from Calcutta to Hardvar was particularly trying. Sometimes the compartments had no lights. From Saharanpur we were huddled into carriages for goods or cattle. These had no roofs, and what with the blazing midday sun overhead and the scorching iron floor beneath, we were all but roasted. The pangs of thirst, caused by even such a journey as this, could not persuade orthodox Hindus to take water, if it was 'Musalmani'. They waited until they could get the 'Hindu' water. These very Hindus, let it be noted, do not so much as hesitate or inquire when during illness the doctor administers them wine or prescribe beef tea or a Musalman or Christian compounder gives them water.

Our stay in Shantiniketan had taught us that the scavenger's work would be our special function in India. Now for the volunteers in Hardvar tents had been pitched in a *dharmashala*, and Dr. Dev had dug some pits to be used as latrines. He had had to depend on paid scavengers for looking after these. Here was work for the Phoenix party. We offered to cover up the excreta with earth and to see to their disposal, and Dr. Dev gladly accepted our offer. The offer was naturally made by me, but it was Maganlal Gandhi who had to execute it. My business was mostly to keep sitting in the tent giving *darshan* and holding religious and other discussions with numerous pilgrims



who called on me. This left me not a minute which I could call my own. I was followed even to the bathing *ghat* by these *darshan*-seekers, nor did they leave me alone whilst I was having my meals. Thus it was in Hardvar that I realized what a deep impression my humble services in South Africa had made throughout the whole of India.

But this was no enviable position to be in. I felt as though I was between the devil and the deep sea. Where no one recognized me, I had to put up with the hardships that fall to the lot of the millions in this land, e.g., in railway travelling. Where I was surrounded by people who had heard of me I was the victim of their craze for *darshan*. Which of the two conditions was more pitiable, I have often been at a loss to determine. This at least I know that the *darshanvalas*' blind love has often made me angry, and more often sore at heart. Whereas travelling, though often trying, has been uplifting and has hardly ever roused me to anger.

I was in those days strong enough to roam about a lot, and was fortunately not so known as not to be able to go in the streets without creating much fuss. During these roamings I came to observe more of the pilgrims' absent-mindedness, hypocrisy and slovenliness, than of their piety. The swarm of sadhus, who had descended there, seemed to have been born but to enjoy the good things of life.

Here I saw a cow with five feet! I was astonished but knowing men soon disillusioned me. The poor five-footed cow was a sacrifice to the greed of the wicked. I learnt that the fifth foot was nothing else but a foot cut off from a live calf and grafted upon the shoulder of the cow! The result of this double cruelty was exploited to fleece the ignorant of their money. There was no Hindu but would be attracted by a five-footed cow, and no Hindu but would lavish his charity on such a miraculous cow.

The day of the fair was now upon us. It proved a red-letter day for me. I had not gone to Hardvar with the sentiments of a pilgrim. I have never thought of frequenting places of pilgrimage in search of piety. But the seventeen lakhs of men that were reported to be there could not all

be hypocrites or mere sight-seers. I had no doubt that countless people amongst them had gone there to earn merit and for self-purification. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say to what extent this kind of faith uplifts the soul.

I therefore passed the whole night immersed in deep thought. There were those pious souls in the midst of the hypocrisy that surrounded them. They would be free of guilt before their Maker. If the visit to Hardvar was in itself a sin, I must publicly protest against it, and leave Hardvar on the day of Kumbha. If the pilgrimage to Hardvar and to the Kumbha fair was not sinful, I must impose some act of self-denial on myself in atonement for the iniquity prevailing there and purify myself. This was quite natural for me. My life is based on disciplinary resolutions. I thought of the unnecessary trouble I had caused to my hosts at Calcutta and Rangoon, who had so lavishly entertained me. I therefore decided to limit the articles of my daily diet and to have my final meal before sunset. I was convinced that, if I did not impose these restrictions on myself, I should put my future hosts to considerable inconvenience and should engage them in serving me rather than engage myself in service. So I pledged myself never whilst in India to take more than five articles in twenty-four hours, and never to eat after dark. I gave the fullest thought to the difficulties I might have to face. But I wanted to leave no loophole. I rehearsed to myself what would happen during an illness, if I counted medicine among the five articles, and made no exception in favour of special articles of diet. I finally decided that there should be no exception on any account whatsoever.

I have been under these vows for now thirteen years. They have subjected me to a severe test, but I am able to testify that they have also served as my shield. I am of opinion that they have added a few years to my life and saved me from many an illness.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part V, Chap. VII*



## LAKSHMAN JHULA

It was a positive relief to reach the Gurukul and meet Mahatma Munshiramji with his giant frame. I at once felt the wonderful contrast between the peace of the Gurukul and the din and noise of Hardvar.

The Mahatma overwhelmed me with affection. The *Brahmacharis* were all attention. It was here that I was first introduced to Acharya Ramadevji, and I could immediately see what a force and a power he must be. We had different viewpoints in several matters, nevertheless our acquaintance soon ripened into friendship.

I had long discussions with Acharya Ramadevji and other professors about the necessity of introducing industrial training into the Gurukul. When the time came for going away it was a wrench to leave the place.

I had heard much in praise of the Lakshman Jhula (a hanging bridge over the Ganges) some distance from Hrishikesh, and many friends pressed me not to leave Hardvar without having gone as far as the bridge. I wanted to do this pilgrimage on foot and so I did it in two stages.

Many *sannyasis* called on me at Hrishikesh. One of them was particularly attracted towards me. The Phoenix party was there and their presence drew from the Swami many questions.

We had discussions about religion and he realized that I felt deeply about matters of religion. He saw me bare-headed and shirtless as I had returned from my bath in the Ganges. He was pained to miss the *shikha* (tuft of hair) on my head and the sacred thread about my neck and said:

‘It pains me to see you, a believing Hindu, going without a sacred thread and the *shikha*. These are the two external symbols of Hinduism and every Hindu ought to wear them.’

Now there is a history as to how I came to dispense with both. When I was an urchin of ten, I envied the

Brahman lads sporting bunches of keys tied to their sacred threads, and I wished I could do likewise. The practice of wearing the sacred thread was not then common among the *vaishya* families in Kathiawad. But a movement had just been started for making it obligatory for the first three *varnas*. As a result several members of the Gandhi clan adopted the sacred thread. The Brahman who was teaching two or three of us boys *Ram Raksha* invested us with the thread, and although I had no occasion to possess a bunch of keys, I got one and began to sport it. Later, when the thread gave way, I do not remember whether I missed it very much. But I know that I did not go in for a fresh one.

As I grew up several well-meaning attempts were made both in India and South Africa to re-invest me with the sacred thread, but with little success. If the *shudras* may not wear it, I argued, what right have the other *varnas* to do so? And I saw no adequate reason for adopting what was to me an unnecessary custom. I had no objection to the thread as such, but the reasons for wearing it were lacking.

As a *vaishnava* I had naturally worn round my neck the *kanthi*, and the *shikha* was considered obligatory by elders. On the eve of my going to England, however, I got rid of the *shikha*, lest when I was bareheaded it should expose me to ridicule and make me look, as I then thought, a barbarian in the eyes of the Englishmen. In fact this cowardly feeling carried me so far that in South Africa I got my cousin Chhaganlal Gandhi, who was religiously wearing the *shikha*, to do away with it. I feared that it might come in the way of his public work and so, even at the risk of paining him, I made him get rid of it.

I therefore made a clean breast of the whole matter to the Swami and said:

‘I will not wear the sacred thread, for I see no necessity for it, when countless Hindus can go without it and yet remain Hindus. Moreover, the sacred thread should be a symbol of spiritual regeneration, presupposing a deliberate attempt on the part of the wearer at a higher and purer life. I doubt whether in the present state of



Hinduism and of India, Hindus can vindicate the right to wear a symbol charged with such a meaning. That right can come only after Hinduism has purged itself of untouchability, has removed all distinctions of superiority and inferiority, and shed a host of other evils and shams that have become rampant in it. My mind therefore rebels against the idea of wearing the sacred thread. But I am sure your suggestion about the *shikha* is worth considering. I once used to have it, and I discarded it from a false sense of shame. And so I feel that I should start growing it again. I shall discuss the matter with my comrades.'

The Swami did not appreciate my position with regard to the sacred thread. The very reasons that seemed to me to point to not wearing it appeared to him to favour its wearing. Even today my position remains about the same as it was at Hrishikesh. So long as there are different religions, every one of them may need some outward distinctive symbol. But when the symbol is made into a fetish and an instrument of proving the superiority of one's religion over others, it is fit only to be discarded. The sacred thread does not appear to me today to be a means of uplifting Hinduism. I am therefore indifferent to it.

As for the *shikha*, cowardice having been the reason for discarding it, after consultation with friends I decided to re-grow it.

But to return to Lakshman Jhula. I was charmed with the natural scenery about Hrishikesh and the Lakshman Jhula, and bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in Nature, and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance.

But the way in which men were using these beauty spots was far from giving me peace. As at Hardvar, so at Hrishikesh, people dirtied the roads and the fair banks of the Ganges. They did not even hesitate to desecrate the sacred water of the Ganges. It filled me with agony to see people performing natural functions on the thoroughfares and river banks, when they could easily have gone a little farther away from public haunts.

Lakshman Jhula was, I saw, nothing but an iron suspension bridge over the Ganges. I was told that originally there had been a fine rope-bridge. But a philanthropic Marwadi got it into his head to destroy the rope-bridge and erect an iron one at a heavy cost and then entrusted the keys to the Government! I am at a loss to say anything about the rope-bridge as I have never seen it, but the iron bridge is entirely out of place in such surroundings and mars their beauty. The making over of the keys of this pilgrims' bridge to Government was too much even for my loyalty of those days.

The *Svargashram* which one reaches after crossing the bridge was a wretched place, being nothing but a number of shabby-looking sheds of galvanized iron sheets. These, I was told, were made for *sadhakas* (aspirants). There were hardly any living there at the moment. Those who were in the main building gave one an unfavourable impression.

But the Hardvar experiences proved for me to be of inestimable value. They helped me in no small way to decide where I was to live and what I was to do.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part V, Chap. VIII

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### FOUNDING OF THE ASHRAM

The pilgrimage to the Kumbha fair was my second visit to Hardvar.

The Satyagraha Ashram was founded on the 25th of May, 1915. Shraddhanandji wanted me to settle in Hardvar. Some of my Calcutta friends recommended Vaidyanathadham. Others strongly urged me to choose Rajkot. But when I happened to pass through Ahmedabad, many friends pressed me to settle down there, and they volunteered to find the expenses of the Ashram, as well as a house for us to live in.

I had a predilection for Ahmedabad. Being a Gujarati I thought I should be able to render the greatest service to the country through the Gujarati language. And then, as Ahmedabad was an ancient centre of handloom weaving,



it was likely to be the most favourable field for the revival of the cottage industry of hand-spinning. There was also the hope that, the city being the capital of Gujarat, monetary help from its wealthy citizens would be more available here than elsewhere.

The question of untouchability was naturally among the subjects discussed with the Ahmedabad friends. I made it clear to them that I should take the first opportunity of admitting an untouchable candidate to the Ashram if he was otherwise worthy.

‘Where is the untouchable who will satisfy your condition?’ said a *vaishnava* friend self-complacently.

I finally decided to found the Ashram at Ahmedabad.

So far as accommodation was concerned, Sjt. Jivanlal Desai, a barrister in Ahmedabad, was the principal man to help me. He offered to let, and we decided to hire, his Kochrab bungalow.

The first thing we had to settle was the name of the Ashram. I consulted friends. Amongst the names suggested were ‘Sevashram’ (the abode of service), ‘Tapovan’ (the abode of austerities), etc.. I liked the name ‘Sevashram’ but for the absence of emphasis on the method of service. ‘Tapovan’ seemed to be a pretentious title, because though *tapas* was dear to us we could not presume to be *tapasvins* (men of austerity). Our creed was devotion to truth, and our business was the search for and insistence on truth. I wanted to acquaint India with the method I had tried in South Africa, and I desired to test in India the extent to which its application might be possible. So my companions and I selected the name ‘Satyagraha Ashram’, as conveying both our goal and our method of service.

For the conduct of the Ashram a code of rules and observances was necessary. A draft was therefore prepared, and friends were invited to express their opinions on it. Amongst the many opinions that were received, that of Sir Gurudas Banerji is still in my memory. He liked the rules, but suggested that humility should be added as one of the observances, as he believed that the younger generation sadly lacked humility. Though I noticed this fault, I feared humility would cease to be humility the moment

it became a matter of vow. The true connotation of humility is self-effacement. Self-effacement is *moksha* (salvation), and whilst it cannot, by itself, be an observance, there may be other observances necessary for its attainment. If the acts of an aspirant after *moksha* or a servant have no humility or selflessness about them, there is no longing for *moksha* or service. Service without humility is selfishness and egotism.

There were at this time about thirteen Tamilians in our party. Five Tamil youngsters had accompanied me from South Africa, and the rest came from different parts of the country. We were in all about twenty-five men and women.

This is how the Ashram was started. All had their meals in a common kitchen and strove to live as one family.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part V, Chap. IX

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### ON THE ANVIL

The Ashram had been in existence only a few months when we were put to a test such as I had scarcely expected. I received a letter from Amritlal Thakkar to this effect: 'A humble and honest untouchable family is desirous of joining your Ashram. Will you accept them?'

I was perturbed. I had never expected that an untouchable family with an introduction from no less a man than Thakkar Bapa would so soon be seeking admission to the Ashram. I shared the letter with my companions. They welcomed it.

I wrote to Amritlal Thakkar expressing our willingness to accept the family, provided all the members were ready to abide by the rules of the Ashram.

The family consisted of Dudabhai, his wife Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi, then a mere toddling babe. Dudabhai had been a teacher in Bombay. They all agreed to abide by the rules and were accepted.

But their admission created a flutter amongst the friends who had been helping the Ashram. The very first



difficulty was found with regard to the use of the well, which was partly controlled by the owner of the bungalow. The man in charge of the water-lift objected that drops of water from our bucket would pollute him. So he took to swearing at us and molesting Dudabhai. I told everyone to put up with the abuse and continue drawing water at any cost. When he saw that we did not return his abuse, the man became ashamed and ceased to bother us.

All monetary help, however was stopped. The friend who had asked that question about an untouchable being able to follow the rules of the Ashram had never expected that any such would be forthcoming.

With the stopping of monetary help came rumours of proposed social boycott. We were prepared for all this. I had told my companions that, if we were boycotted and denied the usual facilities, we would not leave Ahmedabad. We would rather go and stay in the untouchables' quarter and live on whatever we could get by manual labour.

Matters came to such a pass that Maganlal Gandhi one day gave me this notice: 'We are out of funds and there is nothing for the next month.'

I quietly replied: 'Then we shall go to the untouchables' quarter.'

This was not the first time I had been faced with such a trial. On all such occasions God has sent help at the last moment. One morning, shortly after Maganlal had given me warning of our monetary plight, one of the children came and said that a Sheth who was waiting in a car outside wanted to see me. I went out to him. 'I want to give the Ashram some help. Will you accept it?' he asked.

'Most certainly,' said I. 'And I confess I am at the present moment at the end of my resources.'

'I shall come tomorrow at this time,' he said. 'Will you be here?'

'Yes,' said I, and he left.

Next day, exactly at the appointed hour, the car drew up near our quarters, and the horn was blown. The children came with the news. The Sheth did not come in. I went out to see him. He placed in my hands currency notes of the value of Rs. 13,000, and drove away.

I had never expected this help, and what a novel way of rendering it! The gentleman had never before visited the Ashram. So far as I can remember, I had met him only once. No visit, no enquiries, simply rendering help and going away! This was a unique experience for me. The help deferred the exodus to the untouchables' quarter. We now felt quite safe for a year.

Just as there was a storm outside, so was there a storm in the Ashram itself. Though in South Africa untouchable friends used to come to my place and live and feed with me, my wife and other women did not seem quite to relish the admission into the Ashram of the untouchable friends. My eyes and ears easily detected their indifference, if not their dislike, towards Danibehn. The monetary difficulty had caused me no anxiety, but this internal storm was more than I could bear. Danibehn was an ordinary woman. Dudabhai was a man with slight education but of good understanding. I liked his patience. Sometimes he did flare up, but on the whole I was well impressed with his forbearance. I pleaded with him to swallow minor insults. He not only agreed, but prevailed upon his wife to do likewise.

The admission of this family proved a valuable lesson to the Ashram. In the very beginning we proclaimed to the world that the Ashram would not countenance untouchability. Those who wanted to help the Ashram were thus put on their guard, and the work of the Ashram in this direction was considerably simplified. The fact that it is mostly the real orthodox Hindus who have met the daily growing expenses of the Ashram is perhaps a clear indication that untouchability is shaken to its foundation. There are indeed many other proofs of this, but the fact that good Hindus do not scruple to help an Ashram where we go the length of dining with the untouchables is no small proof.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part V, Chap. X*



## A PEEP INTO THE ASHRAM

All the while I was in Champaran the Ashram was never out of my mind, and occasionally I paid it flying visits.

At that time the Ashram was in Kochrab, a small village near Ahmedabad. Plague broke out in this village, and I saw evident danger to the safety of the Ashram children. It was impossible to keep ourself immune from the effects of the surrounding insanitation, however scrupulously we might observe the rules of cleanliness within the Ashram walls. We were not then equal either to getting the Kochrab people to observe these rules nor to serving the village otherwise.

Our ideal was to have the Ashram at a safe distance both from town and village, and yet at a manageable distance from either. And we were determined, some day, to settle on ground of our own.

The plague, I felt, was sufficient notice to quit Kochrab. Sjt. Punjabhai Hirachand, a merchant in Ahmedabad, had come in close contact with the Ashram, and used to serve us in a number of matters in a pure and selfless spirit. He had a wide experience of things in Ahmedabad, and he volunteered to procure us suitable land. I went about with him north and south of Kochrab in search of land, and then suggested to him to find out a piece of land three or four miles to the north. He hit upon the present site. Its vicinity to the Sabarmati Central Jail was for me a special attraction. As jail-going was understood to be the normal lot of Satyagrahis, I liked this position. And I knew that the sites selected for jails have generally clean surroundings.

In about eight days the sale was executed. There was no building on the land and no tree. But its situation on the bank of the river and its solitude were great advantages.

We decided to start by living under canvas, and having a tin shed for a kitchen, till permanent houses were built.

The Ashram had been slowly growing. We were now over forty souls, men, women and children, having our meals at a common kitchen. The whole conception about the removal was mine, the execution was as usual left to Maganlal.

Our difficulties, before we had permanent living accommodation, were great. The rains were impending, and provisions had to be got from the city four miles away. The ground, which had been a waste, was infested with snakes, and it was no small risk to live with little children under such conditions. The general rule was not to kill the snakes, though I confess none of us had shed the fear of these reptiles, nor have we even now.

The rule of not killing venomous reptiles has been practised for the most part at Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati. At each of these places we had to settle on waste lands. We have had, however, no loss of life occasioned by snakebite. I see, with the eye of faith, in this circumstance the hand of the God of Mercy. Let no one cavil at this, saying that God can never be partial, and that He has no time to meddle with the humdrum affairs of men. I have no other language to express the fact of the matter, to describe this uniform experience of mine. Human language can but imperfectly describe God's ways. I am sensible of the fact that they are indescribable and inscrutable. But if mortal man will dare to describe them, he has no better medium than his own inarticulate speech. Even if it be a superstition to believe that complete immunity from harm for twenty-five years in spite of a fairly regular practice of non-killing is not a fortuitous accident but a grace of God, I should still hug that superstition.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part V, Chap. XXI*



## FAREWELL

It is not without a wrench that I have to take leave of the reader. I set a high value on my experiments. I do not know whether I have been able to do justice to them. I can only say that I have spared no pains to give a faithful narrative. To describe truth, as it has appeared to me, and in the exact manner in which I have arrived at it, has been my ceaseless effort. The exercise has given me ineffable mental peace, because, it has been my fond hope that it might bring faith in Truth and Ahimsa to waverers.

My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain. And, even though my efforts in this behalf may prove fruitless, let the readers know that the vehicle, not the great principle, is at fault. After all, however sincere my strivings after Ahimsa may have been, they have still been imperfect and inadequate. The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence. But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsa.

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification; without self-purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream; God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings.

But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity, in spite of constant ceaseless striving for it. That is why the world's praise fails to move me, indeed it very often stings me. To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms. Ever since my return to India I have had experiences of the dormant passions lying hidden within me. The knowledge of them has made me feel humiliated though not defeated. The experiences and experiments have sustained me and given me great joy. But I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse. I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part V, "Farewell"*



## SECTION THREE : PERSONAL

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### GANDHIJI'S PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

(From "Notes" by K. G. Mashruwala)

At my request the Bombay Government has supplied me with the following information regarding Gandhiji from its Jail Records:

Height—5' 5"

Identification marks:

(1) A scar  $\frac{1}{4}'' \times \frac{1}{6}''$  on the right thigh at a distance of about one-third from the lower end on the front side;

(2) A small mole on the outer side under the lower right eye-lid;

(3) A scar about the size of a pea below the left elbow on the inner side at about one-third distance from the lower end.

I sent my request in English under the impression that it would be more convenient for the department concerned. I was agreeably surprised to receive the reply in Gujarati.

*Harijan*, 26-6-'49, p. 136

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### BUT WHO AM I ?

(From "In God's Good Hands")

But who am I? I have no strength save what God gives me. I have no authority over my countrymen save the purely moral. If He holds me to be a pure instrument for the spread of non-violence in the place of the awful violence now ruling the earth, He will give me the strength and show me the way. My greatest weapon is mute prayer. The cause of peace is, therefore, in God's good hands. Nothing can happen but by His will expressed in His eternal, changeless Law which is He. We neither know Him nor His Law save through the glass darkly. But the faint glimpse

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of the Law is sufficient to fill me with joy, hope and faith in the future.

*Harijan*, 9-12-'39, p. 370 at p. 371

## 111

## A MESSENGER OF GOD !

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the above title)

I have received a cutting, in which I am reported to be credited with being a messenger of God, and I am asked whether I claim to have any special revelation from God. I have already dealt with the miracles attributed to me. As to this the latest charge, I must disown it. I pray like every good Hindu. I believe that we can all become messengers of God, if we cease to fear man and seek only God's Truth. I do believe I am seeking only God's Truth and have lost all fear of man. I, therefore, do *feel* that God is with the movement of non-co-operation. I have no special revelation of God's will. My firm belief is that He reveals Himself daily to every human being but we shut our ears to the 'still small voice'. We shut our eyes to the Pillar of Fire in front of us. I *realize* His omnipresence. And it is open to the writer to do likewise.

*Young India*, 25-5-'21, p. 161

## 112

## AM I A MESSENGER OF GOD ?

(Some relevant paragraphs from an article which appeared under the above title)

A Muslim friend writes a long letter which pruned down reads as follows:

"The chief difficulty that stands in your way of right thinking is that your heart has so hardened by looking at and interpreting things in the light of your self-assumed principles, that you cannot bring to bear an open mind on anything, howsoever valuable it may be.

"If God has not appointed you as his messenger, what you say or teach cannot be claimed to be a word of God. No one would



contest the truthfulness of truth and non-violence as teachings of Prophets and principles of very high spiritual value, but their true understanding and application required a soul that is in direct communion with God. Any person who has only polished his soul by suppressing or acting against the desires and cravings of the flesh and the self is not a Prophet.

“The fact that you stand as a teacher of the world and claim to have diagnosed the disease from which the world is suffering, and proclaim that the truth of your choice and practice, and the non-violence of your conviction and application are the only cures for the afflicted world, betrays your utter disregard and mis-conception of the truth. You admit you make mistakes. Your non-violence is actually a concealed violence as it is not based on actual spiritual life and is not the earnest of true inspiration from God.

“As a true believer, and in pursuance of that teaching of Islam which enjoins on every Muslim to convey the truth to every human being, I would request you to clear your mind of all complexes, to place yourself in the position of an ordinary human being who wants to learn and not to teach, and to become a real seeker after truth.

“If you wish to find out the truth, I would request you to study the Koran and the life of the Prophet Mohamed (Peace of God be upon him) written by Shebli Nowani and M. Sulaiman Nadwi with an open mind.”

I have omitted no argument used by the writer.

I have not hardened my heart. I have never claimed to be a messenger of God except in the sense in which all human beings are. I am a mortal as liable to err as any other. Nor have I claimed to be a teacher. But I cannot prevent admirers from calling me a teacher or a Mahatma, as I cannot prevent traducers from calling me all sorts of names and ascribing to me vices to which I am a stranger. I lay both praise and blame at the feet of the Almighty and go my way.

For the information of my correspondent, who is a school-master in a high school, I may say that I have reverently studied the works he mentions and also many other works on Islam. I have more than once read the Koran. My religion enables me, obliges me, to imbibe

all that is good in all the great religions of the earth. This does not mean I must accept the interpretation that my correspondent may put upon the message of the Prophet of Islam or any other Prophet. I must use the limited intelligence that God has given me to interpret the teachings bequeathed to mankind by the Prophets of the world. I am glad to find that my correspondent agrees that truth and non-violence are taught by the holy Koran. Surely it is for him, as for every one of us, to apply these principles to daily life according to the light given to us by God.

*Harijan*, 28-10-'39, p. 317

## 113

## AMAZING MISCONCEPTIONS

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the above caption)

There is a homely proverb in Gujarati which means, a noted banker continually adds to his wealth, as a notorious criminal continually comes in for undeserved blame. Whether I am to be regarded as a reformer or a criminal, the situations I find myself in are most curious and often embarrassing. The people credit me with supernatural powers when the only powers I have are derived from my scrupulous regard for truth, an unquenchable industry, fair play to opponents, readiness always to admit mistakes, and an incessant appeal to reason. But the simple-minded masses will not believe me when I tell them I possess no extraordinary powers. Similarly those who are not accustomed to absolutely honest dealings in politics persist in crediting me with all kinds of wickedness.

*Young India*, 13-4-'21, p. 113 at p. 114



## I AM NO RELIGIOUS TEACHER

(From "For the Sikh Friends")

I have never considered myself as a religious teacher. I have never asked anyone to disown his own faith, in order to accept non-violence or my teaching. I have not known any religion to make violence obligatory. Most religions have permitted it, where non-violence is not possible. But I have no right to judge other religions. I entertain equal respect for all religions. I must, if I expect others to respect mine.

*Harijan*, 5-7-'42, p. 209

## I AM NO EXTRAORDINARY MAN

(From "A Libel" in "Notes")

I have often said that I do not claim to be an extraordinary man unless one who is mad after the search for Truth be called extraordinary. I am certainly mad in the sense that every honest man should be. I have disclaimed the title of a saint for I am fully conscious of my limitations and imperfections. I claim to be a servant of India and therethrough of humanity.

*Young India*, 19-3-'25, p. 98

## NOT A SAINT BUT A VOTARY OF TRUTH

(The following paragraph is taken from an article which originally appeared under the title "A Candid Critic".)

To clothe me with sainthood is too early, even if it is possible. I myself do not feel a saint in any shape or form. But I do feel I am a votary of Truth in spite of all my errors of unconscious omission and commission. The correspondent has judged rightly that I am not 'a statesman in the garb of a saint'. But since Truth is the highest wisdom, sometimes my acts appear to be consistent with the highest statesmanship. But I hope I have no policy in me

save the policy of Truth and Ahimsa. I will not sacrifice Truth and Ahimsa even for the deliverance of my country or religion. This is as much as to say that neither can be so delivered.

*Young India*, 20-1-'27, p. 21

## 117

## NOT A MAHATMA BUT A SATYAGRAHI

(From a speech of Gandhiji at Navsari, a summary of which appeared in "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

I have no relish for the title of the Mahatma given me by the people, if only because I am unworthy of it, but I have given myself a title of which I am proud. I call myself a Satyagrahi, and as I must live up to it, I cannot but utter the bitter truth, whenever there is an occasion for it.

*Young India*, 19-3-'31, p. 43 at p. 45

## 118

## SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT "MAHATMA"

(A correspondent sent to Gandhiji a formidable list of Questions about the Non-co-operation Movement. Some questions and answers thereto are reproduced hereinbelow.)

Q.: Are you really a Mahatma ?

A.: I do not feel like being one. But I do know that I am among the humblest of God's creatures.

Q.: If so, will you define the word Mahatma ?

A.: Not being acquainted with one, I cannot give any definition.

Q.: If not, did you ever tell your followers that you are not one ?

A.: The more I repudiate, the more it is used.

Q.: In what relation do you stand to Count Tolstoy ?

A.: As a devoted admirer who owes much in life to him.

*Young India*, 27-10-'21, p. 342



## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORD “MAHATMA” ?

(A question and answer thereto from “A Hotch-pot of Questions”)

I have got some taxing readers of *Young India* who often ask inconvenient questions. But as they please them I must suffer the inconvenience and answer their questions however vexing they may be. This is how a correspondent fires the first shot:

“Who is responsible for the word “Mahatma” before your name of the list of Executive Councillors, A.I.S.A., as given in *Young India*, of 1st October?”

The correspondent may depend upon it that the editor is not responsible for the appearance of the word Mahatma in the list of members of the Council of the A.I.S.A. Those who passed the Constitution are certainly responsible for it. Had I offered Satyagraha against it, the word might not have appeared. But I did not consider the offence to be serious enough to call for the use of that terrible weapon. Unless some catastrophe takes place the offensive word will always be associated with my name, and the patient critics must tolerate it even as I do.

*Young India*, 5-11-'25, p. 378

## I AM NOT A MAHATMA

### I

(The following extract is taken from Gandhiji's speech at Sholapur, report of which appeared along with report of another speech of his in an article called “Two Speeches” by M. D.)

I am not a Mahatma. If I am one, the Mahatmaship is but the expression of some *Shakti*. Pray do nothing for my sake. I shuddered when some one proposed that though I was silent I should exhibit myself for *darshan*. I assure you that the words *darshan* and Mahatma stink in my nostrils. I am unworthy of giving *darshan*. Even like you

I am a vessel of clay, liable to all the affections and passions that flesh is heir to. How can I be fit to give you *darshan*? One and only one *darshan* is necessary, viz. that of the Nameless, Formless, Indefinable, Absolute. Try if you can to see Him everywhere, in a poor man's hut as in a palace, in a latrine as well as in a temple. . . . Dismiss the mortal frame called Gandhi from your mind. Its *darshan* will be of no avail.

*Young India*, 10-3-'27, p. 79 at p. 80

## II

(An extract from an article which appeared under the title "No and Yes" is given below.)

The Mahatma I must leave to his fate. Though a non-co-operator I shall gladly subscribe to a bill to make it criminal for anybody to call me Mahatma and to touch my feet. Where I can impose the law myself, i.e. at the Ashram, the practice is criminal.

*Young India*, 17-3-'27 p. 85

## 121

### NEITHER A SAINT NOR A POLITICIAN

A kind friend has sent me the following cutting from the April number of the *East and West*:

"Mr. Gandhi has the reputation of a saint but it seems that the politician in him often dominates his decisions. He has been making great use of *hartals* and there can be no gainsaying that under his direction *hartal* is becoming a powerful political weapon for uniting the educated and the uneducated on a single question of the day. The *hartal* is not without its disadvantages. It is teaching direct action, and direct action however potent does not work for unity. Is Mr. Gandhi quite sure that he is serving the highest behests of Ahimsa, harmlessness? His proposal to commemorate the shooting at Jallianwala Bagh is not likely to promote concord. It is a tragic incident into which our Government was betrayed, but is the memory of its bitterness worth retaining? Can we not commemorate the event by raising a temple of peace, to help the



widows and orphans, to bless the souls of those who died without knowing why? The world is full of politicians and pettifoggers who in the name of patriotism poison the inner sweetness of man and, as a result, we have wars and feuds and such shameless slaughter as turned Jallianwala Bagh into a shambles. Shall we not now try for a larger symbiosis such as Buddha and Christ preached, and bring the world to breathe and prosper together? Mr. Gandhi seemed destined to be the apostle of such a movement, but circumstances are forcing him to seek the way of raising resistances and group unities. He may yet take up the larger mission of uniting the world."

I have given the whole of the quotation. As a rule, I do not notice criticism of me or my methods except when thereby I acknowledge a mistake or enforce still further the principles criticized. I have a double reason for noticing the extract. For, not only do I hope further to elucidate the principles I hold dear, but I want to show my regard for the author of the criticism whom I know and whom I have admired for many years for the singular beauty of his character. The critic regrets to see in me a politician, whereas he expected me to be a saint. Now I think that the word "saint" should be ruled out of present life. It is too sacred a word to be lightly applied to any body, much less to one like myself who claims only to be a humble searcher after Truth, knows his limitations, makes mistakes, never hesitates to admit them when he makes them, and frankly confesses that he, like a scientist, is making experiments about some "of the eternal verities" of life, but cannot even claim to be a scientist because he can show no tangible proof of scientific accuracy in his methods or such tangible results of his experiments as modern science demands. But though by disclaiming sainthood I disappoint the critic's expectations, I would have him to give up his regrets by answering him that the politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I seem to take part in politics, it is because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake, as I have been doing with more or less success consciously since 1894,

unconsciously, as I have now discovered, ever since reaching years of discretion. Quite selfishly, as I wish to live in peace in the midst of a bellowing storm howling round me, I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by introducing religion into politics. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.

It was in that religious spirit that I came upon *hartal*. I wanted to show that it is not a knowledge of letters that would give India consciousness of herself, or that would bind the educated together. The *hartal* illuminated the whole of India as if by magic on the 6th April 1919. And had it not been for the interruption of the 10th of April brought about by Satan whispering fear into the ears of a Government conscious of its own wrong and inciting to anger a people that were prepared for it by utter distrust of the Government, India would have risen to an unimaginable height. The *hartal* had not only been taken up by the great masses of people in a truly religious spirit but it was intended to be a prelude to a series of direct actions.

But my critic deplores direct action. For, he says, "It does not work for unity." I join issue with him. Never has anything been done on this earth, without direct action. I rejected the word "passive resistance", because of its insufficiency and its being interpreted as a weapon of the weak. It was direct action in South Africa which told and told so effectively that it converted General Smuts to sanity. He was in 1906 the most relentless opponent of Indian aspirations. In 1914 he took pride in doing tardy justice by removing from the Statute Book of the Union a disgraceful measure which, in 1909, he had told Lord Morley, would be never removed, for he then said South Africa would never tolerate repeal of a measure which was twice passed



by the Transvaal Legislature. But what is more, direct action sustained for eight years left behind it not only no bitterness, but the very Indians who put up such a stubborn fight against General Smuts, ranged themselves round his banner in 1915 and fought under him in East Africa. It was direct action in Champaran which removed an age-long grievance. A meek submission when one is chafing under a disability or a grievance which one would gladly see removed, not only does not make for unity, but makes the weak party acid, angry and prepares him for an opportunity to explode. By allying himself with the weak party, by teaching him direct, firm but harmless action, I make him feel strong and capable of defying the physical might. He feels braced for the struggle, regains confidence in himself and knowing that the remedy lies with himself, ceases to harbour the spirit of revenge and learns to be satisfied with a redress of the wrong he is seeking to remedy.

It is working along the same line that I have ventured to suggest a memorial about Jallianwala Bagh. The writer in *East and West* has ascribed to me a proposal which has never once crossed my mind. He thinks that I want "to commemorate the shooting at Jallianwala Bagh". Nothing can be further from my thought than to perpetuate the memory of a black deed. I dare say that before we have come to our own we shall have a repetition of the tragedy and I will prepare the nation for it by treasuring the memory of the innocent dead. The widows and the orphans have been and are being helped, but we cannot "bless the souls of those who died without knowing why", if we will not acquire the ground which has been hallowed by innocent blood and there erect a suitable memorial for them. It is not to serve, if I can help it, as a reminder of foul deed but it shall serve as an encouragement to the nation that it is better to die helpless and unarmed and as victims rather than as tyrants. I would have the future generations remember that we who witnessed the innocent dying did not ungratefully refuse to cherish their memory. As Mrs. Jinnah truly remarked when she gave her mite to the fund, the memorial would at least give us an excuse for

living. After all, it will be the spirit in which the memorial is erected that will decide its character.

What was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached? Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from Heaven upon the hypocrites and the pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action. But even as Buddha and Christ chastised they showed unmistakable gentleness and love behind every act of theirs. They would not raise a finger against their enemies, but would gladly surrender themselves rather than the truth for which they lived. Buddha would have died resisting the priesthood, if the majesty of his love had not proved to be equal to the task of bending the priesthood. Christ died on the cross with a crown of thorns on his head defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise resistances of a non-violent character, I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers named by my critic.

Lastly, the writer of the paragraph quarrels with my 'grouping unities' and would have me to take up 'the larger mission of uniting the world'. I once told him under a common roof that I was probably more cosmopolitan than he. I abide by that expression. Unless I group unities I shall never be able to unite the whole world. Tolstoy once said that if we would but let off the backs of our neighbours the world would be quite alright without any further help from us. And if we can only serve our immediate neighbours by ceasing to prey upon them, the circle of unities thus grouped in the right fashion will ever grow in circumference till, at last, it is coterminus with that of the whole world. More than that it is not given to any man to try to achieve. यथा पिण्डे तथा ब्रह्माण्डे । is as true to-day as ages ago when it was first uttered by an unknown Rishi.

*Young India*, 12-5-'20, p. 2



## HAVE I PROPERTY ?

(Appeared in the "Notes" under the above title)

Among the many curious enquiries I receive, here are some from a correspondent in Guntur District:

"People say Gandhiji does not do what he says. He preaches poverty but possesses property. He wants others to become poor, but he is not poor. He advocates simple and inexpensive life yet his is expensive. So answer the questions below. Do you take anything from the A.I.C.C. or Gujarat Congress Committee for your living and touring expenses? If so, what is the amount? If not, how are you meeting the expenses for your long tours and your food and clothing, if you are, as people take you to be, a property-less man?"

There is much more in the letter of the same kind but I have taken out the most salient points.

I do make the claim that I attempt to act as I preach. But I must confess that I am not as inexpensive in my wants, as I would like to be. My food since my illness costs more than it should. By no means can I call it a poor man's food. My travels too cost more than they did before my illness. I am no longer able to travel long distances third class. Nor do I travel, as I did before, without a companion. All this means not simplicity and poverty, but the reverse of it. I draw nothing from the A.I.C.C. or the Gujarat Committee. But friends find my travelling expenses including food and clothing. Often during my tours railway tickets are purchased by those who invite me and my host everywhere covers me with kind attention which often embarrasses me. People present me during my tours with much more Khaddar than I need. The balance goes to clothe those who need it or it is put in the general Khaddar stock of the Ashram which is conducted in the public interest. I own no property and yet I feel that I am perhaps the richest man in the world. For I have never been in want either for myself or my public concerns. God has always and invariably responded

in time. I can recall several occasions when almost the last penny had been spent for my public activities. Moneys then came in from the most unexpected quarters. These responses have made me humble and filled me with a faith in God and His goodness that will stand the strain of utter distress if it ever becomes my lot in life. It is open to the world therefore to laugh at my dispossessing myself of all property. For me the dispossession has been a positive gain. I would like people to compete with me in my contentment. It is the richest treasure I own. Hence it is perhaps right to say that though I preach poverty, I am a rich man !

*Young India*, 30-4-'25, p. 149

## 123

## THE LIFE I AM LIVING

(Originally appeared in the "Notes" under the title "Poor on 14 Lacs")

A friend writes:

"You are reported to claim to be a *sannyasi* and yet to have taken scrupulous care to have provided yourself with handsome living for yourself and your dependants and that you have made to that end a trust of your estate which is worth fourteen lacs and that you are leading a very easy and comfortable life. Some of us were staggered to hear this. Will you kindly enlighten the public on the point? I myself refuse to believe the report."

If this query had not come from an honest friend whom I know, I would have taken no notice of it, especially as some months ago, in answer to a question about my personal expenses I have dealt with my private affairs. I never had 14 lacs of rupees which I could call my own. What I did have I had certainly reduced to a trust when I renounced all property. But it was a trust for public purposes. I retained for myself nothing out of that trust. But I have never described myself as a *sannyasi*. *Sannyasa* is made of sterner stuff. I regard myself as a householder, leading a humble life of service and in common with my fellow-workers, living upon the charity of friends who defray



the expenses of Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati of which I am one of the founders. The life I am living is certainly very easy and very comfortable, if ease and comfort are a mental state. I have all I need without the slightest care of having to keep any personal treasures. Mine is a life full of joy in the midst of incessant work. In not wanting to think of what tomorrow will bring for me I feel as free as a bird. Indeed at the present moment I may even be described to be living a life of luxury. An English lady, the other day, came to me whilst the train was standing at Gaya station and said, "How is it I see you travelling so comfortably in a second class compartment surrounded by so many people when I expected to find you in a crowded third class compartment? Have you not said that you want to live like the poor? Do you suppose poor people can afford the luxury of second class travelling? Is not your practice inconsistent with your profession?" I straightaway pleaded guilty and did not care to inform this fair inquirer that my body had become too dilapidated to bear the fatigue of incessant third class travelling. I feel that the weakness of the body could not be pleaded as any excuse. I am painfully aware of the fact that there are tens of thousands of men and women much weaker in body that travel third class because they have no friends to provide them with second class travelling expenses. There was, undoubtedly, an inconsistency between my practice and profession of identification with the poor. Such is the tragedy of life and yet in the midst of it I refuse to part with my joy. The thought that I am ceaselessly and honestly struggling against the requirements of the flesh sustains me in spite of the contradiction that the good lady could not fail to see.

*Young India*, 1-10-'25, p. 338

## THE LOIN-CLOTH

## I

A critic has fallen foul of my remark made before the meeting of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce at Delhi that the Indian civilization must not be allowed to be wiped out by the inroads from the West. The critic has confused Indian civilization with the loin-cloth and condemned it.

Mr. Churchill has been kind enough gratuitously to advertise my loin-cloth to the whole world. It has therefore become the fashion to laugh at it as the said critic has done. Let me then explain what it means.

In 1921 Maulana Mahomed Ali was arrested at Waltair whilst he and I were going on a tour to the South. He was torn from Begum Mahomed Ali who was travelling with us. I was deeply moved. She bore the separation bravely and attended meetings in Madras. I left her at Madras and went as far as Madura. On the way I saw in our compartment crowds that were wholly unconcerned with what had happened. Almost without exception they were bedecked in foreign fineries. I entered into conversation with some of them and pleaded for Khadi. For I had no other way open to me to secure the release of the Ali Brothers save through Khadi. They shook their heads as they said, "We are too poor to buy Khadi and it is so dear." I realized the substratum of truth behind the remark. I had my vest, cap, and full *dhoti* on. When these uttered only partial truth, the millions of compulsorily naked men, save for their *langoti* four inches wide and nearly as many feet long, gave through their bare limbs the naked truth. What effective answer could I give them, if it was not to divest myself of every inch of clothing I decently could and thus to a still greater extent bring myself in a line with the ill-clad masses? And this I did the very next morning after the Madura meeting.

Here then there is no question of loin-cloth civilization. The adoption of the loin-cloth was for me a sheer necessity.



But in so far as the loin-cloth also spells simplicity let it represent Indian civilization. It is a mingling of the cultures represented by the different faiths and influenced by the geographic and other environment in which the cultures have met. Thus Islamic culture is not the same in Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and India but it is itself influenced by the conditions of the respective countries. Indian culture is therefore Indian. It is neither Hindu, Islamic nor any other, wholly. It is a fusion of all and essentially eastern. I had in mind that culture. And everyone who calls himself or herself an Indian is bound to treasure that culture, be its trustee and resist any attack upon it.

European civilization is no doubt suited for the Europeans but it will mean ruin for India, if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and assimilate whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it. The incessant search for material comforts and their multiplication is such an evil, and I make bold to say that the Europeans themselves will have to remodel their outlook, if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves. It may be that my reading is wrong, but I know that for India to run after the Golden Fleece is to court certain death. Let us engrave on our hearts the motto of a Western philosopher, 'Plain living and high thinking'. Today it is certain that the millions cannot have high living and we the few who profess to do the thinking for the masses run the risk, in a vain search after high living, of missing high thinking.

*Young India*, 30-4-'31, p. 88

## II

(Extracts from an article which originally appeared under "A Countryman's Advice". The article discussed the question of the dress which Gandhiji should wear during his visit to England for the Round Table Conference and about which he received several advices.)

As to the dress I have had many advisers. But here too my position is simple. If I go to England I shall go

as a representative and nothing more, nothing less. I must therefore appear not as the English would have me but as my representative character demands. I represent the Congress because and in so far as it represents *Daridranarayana*, the semi-starved almost naked villager. And if I represent the landed or moneyed or educated Indians, I do so to the extent that they identify themselves with *Daridranarayana* and desire to promote his interest. I can therefore appear neither in English costume nor in that of the polished Nehrus. In spite of the closest bond between us it would have been just as ludicrous for me to dress as Pandit Motilalji did as it would have been for him to appear in loin-cloth. My loin-cloth is an organic evolution in my life. It came naturally, without effort, without premeditation. My duty as I conceive it, will then be, if I succeed in reaching London, to add nothing more to the loin-cloth than the climate peremptorily demands. I should be guilty of discourtesy to the English if I received them by appearing not as I am but as I may think or friends may think they would have me to be. I should fail at the very beginning of my mission, if I commenced by deception. It may please for the time being, it must offend in the end. If I am to win their hearts as I want to, I can do so only by being cent per cent truthful. Truth is like the Sun. It will melt the icy mountain of suspicion and distrust.

*Young India*, 9-7-'31, p. 173 at P. 174

## 125

### MY INCONSISTENCIES.

I must admit my many inconsistencies. But since I am called "Mahatma", I might well endorse Emerson's saying that "Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds". There is, I fancy, a method in my inconsistencies. In my opinion, there is a consistency running through my seeming inconsistencies, as in nature there is unity running through seeming diversity.

Friends who know me have certified that I am as much a moderate as I am an extremist and as much



conservative as I am a radical. Hence perhaps my good fortune to have friends among these extreme types of men. The mixture is due, I believe, to my view of Ahimsa.

Inconsistency is only apparent. It appears so to many friends because of my responsiveness to varying circumstances. Seeming consistency may really be sheer obstinacy.

I decline to be a slave to precedents or practice I cannot understand or defend on a moral basis. I have sacrificed no principle to gain a political advantage.

It has been my misfortune or good fortune to take the world by surprise. New experiments, or old experiments in new style, must sometimes engender misunderstanding.

Those who have at all followed my humble career even superficially cannot have failed to observe that not a single act of my life has been done to the injury of any individual or nation.

I claim no infallibility. I am conscious of having made Himalayan blunders, but I am not conscious of having made them intentionally or having even harboured enmity towards any person or nation, or any life, human or sub-human.

I am not aware of having done a single thing in my life as a matter of expedience. I have ever held that the highest morality is also the highest expedience.

I have never made a fetish of consistency. I am a votary of Truth and I must say what I feel and think without regard to what I may have said before on it. . . . As my vision gets clearer, my views must grow clearer with daily practice. Where I have deliberately altered an opinion the change should be obvious. Only a careful eye would notice a gradual and imperceptible evolution.

I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my pursuit after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop with the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment.

There are eternal principles which admit of no compromise, and one must be prepared to lay down one's life in the practice of them.

*Gandhiji—His Life and Work*, edited by D. G. Tendulkar & Others, p. 362

## 126

## SOME OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

[A correspondent to *Navajivan* sends a formidable letter wherein he objects to most of my propositions and generally my way of life. A friend has translated my reply to it for the benefit of the readers of *Young India*. Translation of the letter is not given as the reply itself enables the readers to know the objections. —M.K.G.]

Right conduct is not like Euclid's right line. It is like a beautiful tree, not one of whose millions of leaves is like any other. Though, therefore, they are from one seed and belong to the same tree, there is none of the uniformity of a geometrical figure about any part of a tree. And yet we know that the seed, the branches and the leaves are one and the same. We know too that no geometrical figure can bear comparison with a full-blossomed tree in point of beauty and grandeur.

Thereafter where the correspondent sees inconsistency I see neither contradiction nor insanity in my life. It is true that a man cannot see his back, so can he not see his errors or insanity. But the sages have often likened a man of religion to a lunatic. I therefore hug the belief that I may not be insane and may be truly religious. Which of the two I am in truth can only be decided after my death.

I never asked my audience to substitute the spinning wheel for the rosary. I only suggested that they could go on spinning taking the name of Narayana simultaneously. And whilst today the whole country is on fire, I think it behoves us all to fill the buckets of the spinning wheel with the water of yarn and extinguish the fire with the name of Narayana on our lips.



I want to see the spinning wheel everywhere, because I see pauperism everywhere. Not until and unless we have fed and clothed the skeletons of India, will religion have any meaning for them. They are living the cattle life to-day and we are responsible for it. The spinning wheel is therefore a penance for us. Religion is service of the helpless. God manifests Himself to us in the form of the helpless and stricken. But we in spite of our forehead marks take no notice of them, i.e. of God. God is and is not in the Vedas. He who reads the spirit of the Vedas sees God therein. He who clings to the letter of the Vedas is a Vedia—a literalist. Narasimha Mehta does indeed sing the praise of the rosary, and the praise is well merited where it is given. But the same Narasimha has sung:

“Of what avail is the *tilaka* and the *tulsi*, of what avail is the rosary and the muttering of the Name, what avail is the grammatical interpretation of the Veda, what avail is the mastery of the letters? All these are devices to fill the belly and nothing worth without their helping to a realization of the *Para-Brahma*.”

The Musalman does count the beads of his *tasbih*, and the Christian of the rosary. But both would think themselves fallen from religion if their *tasbih* and rosary prevented them from running to the succour of one who, for instance, was lying stricken with a snake-bite. Mere knowledge of the Vedas cannot make our Brahmanas spiritual preceptors. If it did, Max Muller would have become one. The Brahmana who has understood the religion of today will certainly give Vedic learning a secondary place and propagate the religion of the spinning wheel, relieve the hunger of the millions of his starving countrymen and only then, and not until then, lose himself in Vedic studies.

I have certainly regarded spinning superior to the practice of denominational religions. But that does not mean that the latter should be given up. I only mean that a Dharma which has to be observed by the followers of all religions transcends them, and hence I say that a Brahmana is a better Brahmana, a Musalman a better Musalman, a Vaishnava a better Vaishnava, if he turns the wheel in the spirit of service.

I certainly did not repeat the divine word ' Rama ' nor count the beads on account of a feeling that my end was near. But I was too weak then to turn the wheel. I do count the rosary whenever it helps me in concentrating on Rama. When, however, I rise to a pitch of concentration where the rosary is more a hindrance than a help, I drop it. If it was possible for me to turn the wheel in my bed, and if I felt that it would help me in concentrating my mind on God, I would certainly leave the rosary aside and turn the wheel. If I am strong enough to turn the wheel, and I have to make a choice between counting beads or turning the wheel, I would certainly decide in favour of the wheel, making it my rosary, so long as I found poverty and starvation stalking the land. I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of Rama will become a hindrance. When I have realized that Rama transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name. The spinning wheel, the rosary and the Ramanama are all the same to me. They subserve the same end, they teach me the religion of service. I cannot practice Ahimsa without practising the religion of service, and I cannot find the truth without practising the religion of Ahimsa. And there is no religion other than truth. Truth is Rama, Narayana, Ishwara, Khuda, Allah, God. And Narasimha says, "The different shapes into which gold is beaten gives rise to different names and forms; but ultimately it is all gold."

I have nothing to withdraw from what I have said about machines in the *Indian Home Rule*, and a reference will show that I have included the printing press in the machines. It must be remembered that it is not *Indian Home Rule* depicted in that book that I am placing before India. I am placing before the nation parliamentary, i.e. democratic Swaraj. I do not suggest today a destruction of all the machines, but I am making the spinning wheel the master machine. The *Indian Home Rule* depicts an ideal state. The fact that I cannot come up to the ideal condition of things laid down therein is to be attributed to my weakness. I believe that there is no religion greater than Ahimsa, and yet I cannot escape the Himsa which is inevitably



involved in the processes of eating and drinking. The ideal of Ahimsa is however ever before me; therefore, even in these processes I do endeavour to restrain myself. I am striving every moment to reduce even those functions to a minimum.

What I have said about hospitals is also true. And yet I suppose I shall resort to the few medicines I hold lawful, so long as I retain the least attachment for my body. I went to the hospital as a prisoner. I did not run away from it immediately on my release, because I thought it my duty to remain under the care of those who had treated me with courtesy and kindness.

I am however ashamed at the very fact of my illness, inasmuch as I believe that a man should never fall ill. It is humiliating for me to take any medicine, and the more so that it was at all necessary to take me to the hospital.

I have never preferred killing a dacoit to winning him over with love. But he who is not equal to that love, who cannot muster all the love that the act demands, has the right to protect his proteges and his property even by killing the dacoit.

It is a gross error to liken the Englishmen to dacoits. The dacoits loot you by sheer violence, the Englishmen do so chiefly by seducing us. There is thus a great difference of method in the two. A liquor vendor also robs me of my soul by selling his liquor. Should I suggest killing him, or non-co-operating with him? But if an Englishman brutally assaults you, or a liquor vendor forcibly tries to pour liquor down your throat, and if you will not win both over by love, then it is open to you to engage them in an armed combat. It would make no difference if the aggressors in the case were one or many, weak or strong.

*Young India*, 14-8-'24, p. 267

## MY PHILOSOPHY

## I

(From "A Revolutionary's Defence")

I do not believe that 'my philosophy' is an indifferent mixture of Tolstoy and Buddha. I do not know what it is except that it is what I feel to be true. It sustains me. I owe much to Tolstoy and much to Buddha. I still somehow or other fancy that 'my philosophy' represents the true meaning of the teachings of the Gita. I may be totally mistaken. Such a mistake can do no harm either to me or to anybody. For the source of my inspiration is of no consequence if what I stand for be unadulterated truth.

Let the philosophy I represent be tested on its own merits. I hold that the world is sick of armed rebellion. I hold too that whatever may be true of other countries, a bloody revolution will not succeed in India. The masses will not respond. A movement in which masses have no active part can do no good to them. A successful bloody revolution can only mean further misery for the masses. For it would be still foreign rule for them. The non-violence I teach is active non-violence of the strongest. But the weakest can partake in it without becoming weaker. They can only be the stronger for having been in it. The masses are far bolder today than they ever were. A non-violent struggle necessarily involves construction on a mass scale. It cannot therefore lead to *tamas* or darkness or inertia. It means a quickening of the national life. The movement is still going on silently almost imperceptibly but none the less surely.

I do not deny the revolutionary's heroism and sacrifice. But heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause are so much waste of splendid energy and hurt the good cause by drawing away attention from it by the glamour of the misused heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause.

I am not ashamed to stand erect before the heroic and self-sacrificing revolutionary because I am able to pit an equal measure of non-violent men's heroism and



sacrifice untarnished by the blood of the innocent. Self-sacrifice of lone innocent man is a million times more potent than the sacrifice of million men who die in the act of killing others. The willing sacrifice of the innocent is the most powerful retort to insolent tyranny that has yet been conceived by God or man.

I invite the attention of the revolutionaries to the three great hindrances to Swaraj—the incomplete spread of the spinning wheel, the discord between Hindus and Musalmans and the inhuman ban upon the suppressed classes. I ask them to patiently take their due share in this work of patient construction. It may not be spectacular enough. But on that very account it requires all the heroic patience, silent and sustained effort and self-effacement of which the tallest among the revolutionaries is capable. Impatience will blur the revolutionary's vision and lead him astray. Slow and inglorious self-imposed starvation among the starving masses is every time more heroic than the death on the scaffold under false exaltation.

All criticism is not intolerance. I have criticized the revolutionary because I have felt for him. He has the same right to hold me to be in error as I believe him to be in error.

*Young India*, 12-2-'25, p. 58 at p. 60

## II

(From "Are We Rivals?")

My philosophy, if I can be said to have any, excludes the possibility of harm to one's cause by outside agencies. The harm comes deservedly and only when the cause itself is bad, or being good its champions are untrue, faint-hearted or unclean.

*Harijan*, 25-7-'36, p. 185

## MY MISSION—I

(In the following article which is a reply to a letter of one Pandit Ghasita Ram, 'President, All-India Sub-assistant Surgeons Association, Punjab Branch', Gandhiji clears up certain misapprehensions about his mission in life. The said letter is omitted from this collection.)

Let me first however dispose of the advice about my views on medicine. I have not *Indian Home Rule* before me but I recollect sufficient to be able to say that I have nothing to revise about the views set forth there. If I had written it for English readers and in English I would have put the same thought in a manner that would have been more acceptable to the English ear. The original is in Gujarati and was written for the Gujarati readers of *Indian Opinion* of Natal. Moreover what is written there has reference to an ideal state. It is a common error to think that condemnation of measures involves that of men. Medicine does often benumb the soul of the patient. It may, therefore, be considered evil but not therefore necessarily medicine-men. I had precious medical friends when I wrote the book and did not hesitate to seek their advice in times of need. That was as the writer implies inconsistent with my belief regarding the use of medicine. Several friends have said to me the same thing in so many words. I plead guilty. But that is to admit that I am not a perfect man. Unfortunately for me I am far from being perfect. I am an humble aspirant for perfection. I know my way to it also. But knowing the way is not reaching its end. If I was perfect, if I had acquired full control over all my passions even in thought, I should be perfect in body. I am free to confess that daily I am obliged to expend a great amount of mental energy in acquiring control over my thoughts. When I have succeeded, if I ever do, think what a store-house of energy would be set free for service. As I hold that appendicitis was a result of infirmity of thought or mind, so do I concede that my submission to the surgical operation was an additional infirmity of mind. If



I was absolutely free of egoism, I would have resigned myself to the inevitable; but I wanted to live in the present body. Complete detachment is not a mechanical process. One has to grow to it by patient toil and prayer. As for gratitude, I have more than once publicly expressed my gratitude to Col. Maddock and his staff for the kindness with which they overwhelmed me. But there is no connection between the kind treatment I received from Col. Maddock and the system of Government I condemn. Col. Maddock himself would think little of me, if I revised my views about Dyerism because he, Col. Maddock, was a competent surgeon and did his duty as such. Nor have I any cause to be thankful to the Government for providing me with best surgical assistance or for prematurely releasing me. The former they were bound to provide for every prisoner. The latter has embarrassed me. I knew my course in prison whether well or ill. Outside the prison walls, although I am slowly regaining my health, I do not know with certainty how to shape my course.

Now for the central point of the letter. The confusion in the writer's mind has arisen because of his misconception of the work of the prophets he names and of an awkward (for me) comparison between them and me. I do not know that Buddha did not accomplish his task which was to reach *Nirvana*. Tradition has it that he did. Conversion of others was a bye-product, if one may so describe a sacred function. The Gospels record it of Jesus that he testified on the Cross of his own work, 'It is finished'.\* Nor has their work of love died after them. The truest part of it will live for ever. The two or three thousand years that have gone by since their ministry, are but a speck in the vast time circle.

I do not consider myself worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the race of prophets. I am a humble seeker after Truth. I am impatient to realize myself, to attain *moksha* in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh. Thus considered, my service may be regarded as purely selfish. I have no desire for the perishable kingdom

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\* John, 19-30.

of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is *moksha*. To attain my end it is not necessary for me to seek the shelter of a cave. I carry one about me, if I would but know it. A cave-dweller can build castles in the air whereas a dweller in a palace like Janak has no castles to build. The cave-dweller who hovers round the world on the wings of thought has no peace. A Janak though living in the midst of 'pomp and circumstance' may have peace that passeth understanding. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and therethrough of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the Gita I want to live at peace with both friend and foe. Though therefore a Musalman or a Christian or a Hindu may despise me and hate me, I want to love him and serve him even as I would love my wife or son though they hate me. So my patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.

*Young India*, 3-4-'24, p. 113

## 129

### MY MISSION—II

(An extract from Gandhiji's reply to the Rangoon citizens' address is reproduced from the text of the speech which was originally published under the title "My Conception of Patriotism".)

I thank you for this warmth of reception and the kindly sentiments expressed in your address. I am not able just now to appropriate, much less to assimilate all the compliments that you have paid me. But I could certainly claim two things of which you have made kind mention. The first thing is that my mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India, though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of my life and the whole of my time. But through realization of freedom of India I hope to realize and carry



on the mission of brotherhood of man. My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all-embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or the exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always in every case without exception consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large. Not only that but my religion and my patriotism derived from my religion embrace all life. I want to realize brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realize identity with all life, even with such beings as crawl on earth. I want, if I don't give you a shock, to realize identity with even the crawling things on earth, because we claim common descent from the same God, and that being so, all life in whatever form it appears must be essentially one. I can therefore safely claim all the credit that you may choose to give me in describing my mission of brotherhood of man.

*Young India*, 4-4-'29, p. 107

## 130

## THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN MY LIFE

(Gandhiji's answers to some questions put to him by Mr. Will Durant are reproduced below.)

Q.: What meaning life has for you?

A.: Life for me is real as I believe it to be a spark of the Divine.

Q.: What keeps you going?

A.: Striving for full realization keeps me going.

Q.: What help—if any—religion gives you?

A.: Religion not in the conventional but in the broadest sense helps me to have a glimpse of the Divine essence. This glimpse is impossible without full development of the moral sense. Hence religion and morality are, for me synonymous terms.

Q.: What are the sources of your inspiration and your energy?

A.: This strife is the source of whatever inspiration and energy I possess.

Q.: Where you find your consolations and your happiness, where, in the last resort, your treasure lies?

A.: My consolation and my happiness are to be found in the service of all that lives, because the divine essence is the sum total of all life. My treasure lies in battling against darkness and all forces of evil.

*On the Meaning of Life* by Will Durant

### 131

## THE BASIS OF MY WHOLE ACTIVITY

(Originally appeared in the columns of "Notes" under the title "A Bad Comparison")

A Roman Catholic correspondent who occupies the position of the Secretary of a Catholic Indian Association has written a long letter from which I take the following extracts:

"Time and again, I have noticed letters appearing under flaring captions in the nationalist Press, drawing a comparison between your life and activities, and that of Christ. But writers of these letters, not contenting themselves with this achievement of theirs, have gone one step further and have held up 'Gandhiji' as 'the modern Jesus' (!) to the people of India. I was wondering how far they would go, and these letters which flooded the Press during the incarceration stopped awhile; but with your release they have revived. Rejoinders have proved ineffective and that is why I am writing this letter to you.

"Could you look with complacency on this devotion and loyalty bordering on insanity? Nobody denies that you are a great man in your own way; even your opponents grant you that. But you are not God, at any rate I have not discovered you claiming divinity till now. You are preaching politics and not religion. Besides, you are a married man with wife and children. How then is it possible for these blind admirers to see in your life and work any resemblance to that of Christ? I thought that perhaps the doctrine of non-violence of which you are such a noble champion has led them to draw this comparison. But even here you are an



ardent nationalist advocating Ahimsa in politics as a means to an end. Christ on the other hand had not only refused to plunge into politics, asking all to 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' but lived and felt and spoke in terms of humanity transcending by His very nature the cramping and narrow limitations of race and nationalism. He showed also in the most unmistakable manner that 'physical force' for a righteous cause was not at all incompatible with the sublime doctrines He preached. Here again I fail to see the boasted 'likeness and resemblance'.

"So it is only natural for me to ask you what you think of all that these writers have written about you."

The pain that the writer feels over the comparison is obvious. In answer to his question I may repeat what I have said before that I do not like these comparisons at all. They serve no useful purpose and cause unnecessary hurt to the feelings of the devotees of the masters with whose life mine is compared. I lay claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophetship. I am but a humble seeker after Truth and bent upon finding It. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian and ethical is directed to that end. And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes. And as I cannot render this service without entering politics, I find myself in them. Thus I am no master. I am but a struggling, erring, humble servant of India and therethrough of humanity.

*Young India*, 11-9-'24, p. 297 at p. 298

## MY CLAIM

(An extract from "My Position")

So far as my own objective is concerned, my life is an open book. I claim to represent all the cultures, for my religion, whatever it may be called, demands the fulfilment of all cultures. I am at home wherever I go, for I regard all religions with the same respect as my own.

*Harijan*, 13-4-'40, p. 92

## NO SECRETS TO HIDE

(The extracts reproduced below are from an article entitled "A Domestic Chapter", which was written in reply to a letter from a lawyer whose Muslim client was duped into becoming a shareholder in a bogus company called "All-India Stores Ltd." started by Harilal, eldest son of Mahatmaji.)

For me, the law of Satyagraha, the law of love is an eternal principle. I co-operate with all that is good. I desire to non-co-operate with all that is evil, whether it is associated with my wife, son or myself. I have no desire to shield any of the two. I would like the world to know the whole of the evil in us. And in so far as I can, with decency, I let the world into all the domestic secrets so-called. I never make the slightest attempt to hide them, for I know that concealment can only hurt us.

There is much in Harilal's life that I dislike. He knows that. But I love him in spite of his faults. The bosom of a father will take him in as soon as he seeks entrance. For the present, he has shut the door against himself. He must still wander in the wilderness. The protection of a human father has its decided limitations. That of the Divine Father is ever open to him. Let him seek it and he will find it.

*Young India*, 18-6-'25, p. 213



## MY SPHERE OF WORK

(From "A Tissue of Misrepresentations" in "Notes")

I am not omnipotent. I have only a limited sphere of work. I apply myself to the task that comes to me. I go only where I am wanted and where I regard myself competent to render some service.

*Young India*, 25-11-'26, p. 412 at p. 413

## MY RELIGION AND ITS BEARING ON SOCIAL LIFE

(Gandhiji's answers to some questions put to him by Sir S. Radhakrishnan are given below.)

I have been asked by Sir S. Radhakrishnan to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What is your religion?
- (2) How are you led to it?
- (3) What is its bearing on social life?

My religion is Hinduism which, for me, is religion of humanity and includes the best of all the religions known to me.

I take it that the present tense in the second question has been purposely used instead of the past. I am being led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence, i.e., love in the broadest sense. I often describe my religion as religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth I have been saying Truth is God, in order more fully to define my Religion. I used, at one time, to know by heart the thousand names of God which a booklet in Hinduism gives in verse form and which perhaps tens of thousands recite every morning. But nowadays nothing so completely describes my God as Truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known. The most ignorant among mankind have some truth in them. We are all

sparks of Truth. The sum total of these sparks is indescribable, as yet Unknown—Truth, which is God. I am being daily led nearer to it by constant prayer.

The bearing of this religion on social life, is or has to be, seen in one's daily social contact. To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life. Realization of Truth is impossible without a complete merging of oneself in, and identification with, this limitless ocean of life. Hence, for me, there is no escape from social service, there is no happiness on earth beyond or apart from it. Social service here must be taken to include every department of life. In this scheme there is nothing low, nothing high. For, all is one, though we seem to be many.

*Fellowship of Faiths and Unity of Religions*, by M. K. Gandhi, edited by Prof. Abdul Majid Khan, p. 52

## 136

## MINE IS THE RELIGION OF PENANCE AND SELF-PURIFICATION

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D. being extracts from Gandhiji's speech at Nasik)

All my twenty-four hours are consecrated to the service of Lord Krishna who is ever with me, who guides my footsteps, and to whom I always pray to do whatever is needed for me. He will answer for me, if there be any need. . . . Mine is the religion of *tapashcharya*, the way of penance taught by the scriptures and by Tulasidas. That is the law of my being and I cannot do otherwise. . . . The Gita and the Tulasi Ramayana teach me to resort to self-purification whenever I am or my religion is in danger. And what is true for me is true for all. That process of self-purification I am going through all the twenty-four hours of my days. Parvati, Narada had foretold, would have an ominous looking husband. She knew that only Shiva was as blissful as he was ominous looking and she performed penance for winning Shiva and won him. So the lesson of penance and self-purification is writ large everywhere in our scriptures



and the Himalayas are the living witness to it—the Himalayas where countless Rishis ground their bodies to dust for self-purification. The Vedas, to me, are not the texts writ on paper, but my very conscience and the Indweller. They tell me to observe *Yama* and *Niyama* (the cardinal and the casual virtues) and trust everything to Lord Krishna. In all humility I claim that all my work is conducive to the service of Hinduism. As a Hindu, I could do nothing else. The way of doing it is of course my own.

*Young India*, 3-3-'27, p. 65 at p. 66

137

## THE BREATH OF MY LIFE

### I

(Originally appeared under the above caption)

God's ways are inscrutable! The most unexpected event of my life has happened. I have been used to the most unexpected things in the course of a very long public life, but this is the most unexpected of all. What is now in store for me? How shall I use this life out of prison? I do not know. But I must say this that whether in prison or outside prison, Harijan service will be always after my heart and will be the breath of life for me, more precious than the daily bread. I can live for some days at least without the daily bread, but, I cannot live without Harijan service for one single minute. It is a constant prayer to the Almighty that this blot of untouchability may be removed in its entirety from Hinduism and that the millions of caste-Hindus may see the sun of Truth which shines upon us, if we would only remove the scales from our eyes, as I have repeatedly said in these columns. My life is a dedication to this cause and I shall consider no penance too great for the vindication of this Truth.

Parnakuti,

23rd August, 1933,

5-30 p.m.

*Harijan*, 26-8-'33, p. 1

## II

(Originally appeared under the title "No Exaggeration"—condensed from Gujarati)

The following is the gist of a letter from a Gujarati correspondent:

"I have read in the *Harijanbandhu* of the 27th August an article by you in which you say, 'I can live some days at least without the daily bread, but I cannot live without Harijan service for one single minute.' I have observed an exaggeration of expression in many of your writings. People are often confused by utterances like this. If every moment of your life is occupied in Harijan service, how can you find time for other activities? You cannot serve two masters at one and the same time. I realize that for you life is an indivisible whole and your various activities are different phases of it. But the masses cannot comprehend this thing. They would naturally infer from the foregoing sentence that you are going to devote the rest of your life to Harijan service. But that is incorrect, for you will no doubt take up other activities also as occasion arises. This exaggeration of expression has, I believe, even in the past created a confusion in peoples' minds. Therefore, if you keep more sense of proportion in your speech and writing, chances of misunderstanding could be reduced to a minimum. I have written this out of regard for you and ask to be forgiven if I am found guilty of presumption."

It is not clear to me whether the correspondent is himself confounded by my 'exaggeration' or whether he represents the confusion of others only. I should be pained, if it is true that many are confounded by my writings. For I believe I have a keen sense of proportion. As a worshipper of Truth I must eschew all exaggeration. What I have written about Harijan service is, I believe, literally true. But Harijan service does not exclude all other service. One can devote oneself simultaneously to several things which are connected with one another. What I have said of Harijan service can, for instance, with equal truth be said of the service of *Daridranarayana* also, for that service is not inconsistent with the service of the Harijans. Human life is not mechanical. To every one of us there are things as dear as life itself, and one can say that life would be



impossible without them. The measure of the truthfulness of such statements would depend on the intensity of one's devotion to the causes espoused. While in the case of some people separation from a cause claimed to be dear as life itself will not kill them, with others such a separation will be nothing less than a sentence of death.

But it would be wrong to take such devotion to imply that outward activity connected with the object of devotion must go on from moment to moment. It certainly does imply that outward action must be taken whenever occasion demands it. The seed we sow in the ground does not sprout immediately, but if it is not dead, it grows every minute, though we see it as a plant or tree only after many days or months. The process of growth we see in the physical world we should expect to see in the mental and spiritual world also.

The truth of my statement about Harijan service can be measured, if at all, only after my death. The full measure is known only to the all-knowing God. For He alone knows our intentions. I can, therefore, try to satisfy the correspondent, and others who think like him, only by repeating that there is no exaggeration in my claim that Harijan service is the breath of my life and that, therefore, I cannot live for one moment without it.

*Harijan*, 30-9-'33, p. 4

## WHY I AM AN OPTIMIST?

(From "Address to the Anglo-Indians")

I am an irrepressible optimist, because I believe in myself. That sounds very arrogant; doesn't it? But I say it from the depths of my humility. I believe in the supreme power of God. I believe in Truth and therefore I have no doubt in the future of this country or the future of humanity....I trust in God Who knows how to confound the wisdom of men. He is a consummate *Jadugar* and I have placed myself in His hands. But He is a hard task master. He would accept nothing short of the best you are

capable of....I am an optimist because I expect many things from myself. I have not got them I know, as I am not yet a perfect being. If I was one, I should not even need to reason with you. When I am a perfect being, I have simply to say the word, and the nation will listen. I want to attain that perfection by service.

*Young India*, 13-8-'25, p. 277 at p. 279

## 139

## LIFE WITHOUT A SENSE OF HUMOUR

(From "Some Questions and Answers" which appeared in the columns of "Notes")

*Q.*: Do you think a sense of humour is necessary in life?

*A.*: If I had no sense of humour, I should long ago have committed suicide.

*Young India*, 18-8-'21, p. 257 at p. 258

## 140

## ACHIEVING PEACE OF MIND

(One American educationist, Dr. Dodd had a talk with Gandhiji, which appeared under the title "A Talk with an American Friend" by M. D. The following portion from that talk is given below.)

"I would ask one more question, Mr. Gandhi. I have the opportunity of speaking to many young men and women and I should like you to tell me what you consider your most satisfactory achievement—I will not say your greatest achievement, lest I should embarrass you. In other words, what should I put before the young people as a thing that they should aspire after in life?"

"It is a difficult question. I do not know what to say. I can simply say this: I do not know whether you will call it an achievement or not, but I may say that, in the midst of humiliation and so-called defeat and a tempestuous life, I am able to retain my peace, because of an undying faith in God, translated as Truth. We can describe God



as millions of things, but I have for myself adopted the simple formula—"Truth is God".

"I see it, I see it," said Dr. Dodd. "You have achieved peace in a world of confusion and turmoil."

"But several American friends say to me, 'you cannot have peace unless you believe in Jesus'. Well, I tell you I have peace, though I do not believe in Jesus as the only son of God."

"I am glad you said this. May I ask you to let me know your conception of Christ?"

"I consider him as a historical person—one of the greatest amongst the teachers of mankind. I have studied his teachings as prayerfully as I could, with the reverence of a Christian, in order to discover the Truth that is buried in them. I have done so, just as I have done about the teachings of other teachers."

"In this connection, may I ask your opinion on the missionaries' work in India? Have they wronged India?"

"I should not say intentionally. They, of course, come here as critics, they exaggerate our social evils, they criticize our religion. But that does not matter. All their criticism has but served to make us more conscious of our weaknesses and more alive to our duties."

"But that, I suppose, you say of missionaries as individuals, not of missionary societies as such?"

"I should not draw that distinction, for, missionary societies have certain pre-conceived notions of our society and religion which the members propagate. Thirty-five years ago, for instance, as I was passing through Zanzibar, I went to the Bible Society to purchase a copy of the Bible and with that I was given a report of work done by a mission there. I was astounded to find therein that a missionary could count his work in the terms of £. s. d. A convert meant so many shillings, as to a recruiting agent a recruit means so many rupees. One cannot think of a religion in the terms of the number of its adherents."

"What, Mr. Gandhi, has been your greatest disappointment?"

“Frankly, I have no sense of disappointment, excepting perhaps, that sometimes I am disappointed with myself, inasmuch as I cannot control the fleeting thoughts as much as I should like to. That’s all.”

*Harijan*, 14-9-'34, p. 245 at p. 246

## 141

## ON CONQUERING ANGER

(From “Weekly Letter” by M. D.)

In reply to the question of a missionary:

“You have the reputation of never being angry. Is that true?”

Gandhiji replied:

“It is not that I do not get angry. I do not give vent to anger. I cultivate the quality of patience as angerlessness, and generally speaking I succeed. But I only control my anger when it comes. How I find possible to control it would be a useless question, for it is a habit that everyone must cultivate and must succeed in forming by constant practice.”

*Harijan*, 11-5-'35, p. 97 at p. 98

## 142

## THE ROOT AND THE FRUIT

(By N. K. Bose)

An English journalist came to Beliaghata the other day. It was a busy day for Gandhiji and he could spare only a few minutes for the English friend. But within that brief interview a question was raised and discussed, which I should like very much to share with the readers.

Although Gandhiji’s activities ranged from wide social and political fields to the smallest and intensely personal ones, the journalist asked him how he was able to maintain a spirit of detachment in such a surprising manner. Gandhiji replied that it was not true that he



was never off his balance. Such occasions were rare, yet the long exercise of self-restraint enabled him, through God's grace, to keep his irritation within very narrow bounds.

This led the interviewer on to a more fundamental question. From a reading of Gandhiji's writings, the friend had gathered that the root of all of Gandhiji's activities was the desire for *moksha*, emancipation. But why was not this aspect emphasized sufficiently?

Gandhiji replied by taking recourse to a simile. He said the desire for *moksha* was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone other than the individual himself. The world was interested in the fruits, not the root. For the tree itself, however, the chief concern should be not the fruit, but the root. It was in the depth of one's own being that the individual had to concentrate. He had to nurse it with the water of his labour and suffering. The root was his chief concern. But society was concerned with the fruit alone. It had no other data for judgment than the fruits. Was not a tree judged by its fruits?

It was this practice of trying to limit himself to the root, and then not be concerned about the fruit that had given Gandhiji the apparent detachment which the English friend had noticed. But, in his personal opinion, he was yet far from the fullness of its realization. He was still a soul yearning to be wholly free, but ever failing to reach the ideal which he knew to be true. Hence, it would be enough if he could take care of the immediate task before him, whether great or small, with all the care and freedom from bias or mental worries which he could bring to bear upon it.

*Harijan*, 28-9-'47, p. 340

## MY BOND WITH THE MASSES

(From "Indulgence or Self-denial")

For me this year of grace is both an indulgence and a self-denial. It is an indulgence because I hope to fulfil the long-cherished desire of being in the midst of the boys and girls and the fellow-workers of the Ashram. It is a self-denial because it was a pleasure to me to be with so many friends in the different provinces and be the recipient of the affection of the masses between whom and myself there is a bond which defies description but which is felt alike by them and me. I see in the fellowship with them the God I adore. I derive from that fellowship all my consolation, all my hope and all the sustaining power I possess. If I had not realized that bond in South Africa now fully thirty years ago, life would not be worth living for me. But I know that whether I live in the Ashram or whether in their midst, I work for them, think of them and pray for them. I want to live only for them and so for myself.

*Young India*, 7-1-'26, p. 1

## LOVE FOR THE POOR

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

In reply to the question of a missionary:

"When did you come to experience this great love for the poor? Could you tell me the period or the occasion?"

Gandhiji replied:

"I have always had a love for the poor all my life and in abundance. I could cite illustrations after illustrations from my past life to show that it was something innate in me. I have never felt that there was any difference between the poor and me. I have always felt toward them as my own kith and kin."

*Harijan*, 11-5-'35, p. 97 at p. 99



## DIRT AND FILTH

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

In reply to the question of a missionary:

"Don't you have anything like antipathy for filth and dirt?"

Gandhiji replied:

"I have no antipathy against dirty people, but I have a horror of dirt. I should not eat out of a dirty plate nor touch a dirty spoon or kerchief. But I believe in removing dirt to its proper place, where it ceases to be dirt."

*Harijan*, 11-5-'35, p. 97 at p. 99

## WHY I HAVE TAKEN UP JOURNALISM

(From "My Incapacity")

I have taken up journalism not for its sake but merely as an aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life. My mission is to teach by example and precept under severe restraint the use of the matchless weapon of Satyagraha which is a direct corollary of non-violence and truth. I am anxious, indeed I am impatient, to demonstrate that there is no remedy for the many ills of life save that of non-violence. It is a solvent strong enough to melt the stoniest heart. To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics and my vocabulary. It is a training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often, my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds. The reader sees the pages of *Young India* fairly well-dressed up and sometimes with Romain Rolland, he is

inclined to say 'what a fine old man this must be'. Well let the world understand that the fineness is carefully and prayerfully cultivated. And if it has proved acceptable to some whose opinion I cherish, let the reader understand that when that fineness has become perfectly natural, i.e., when I have become incapable of evil and when nothing harsh or haughty occupies, be it momentarily my thought-world, then and not till then, my non-violence will move all the hearts of all the world. I have placed before me and the reader no impossible ideal or ordeal. It is a man's prerogative and birth-right. We have lost the paradise only to regain it. If it takes time, then, it is but a speck in the complete time-circle. The Divine Teacher of the Gita knew when he said that millions of our days are equal to only a day of Brahma. Let us not, therefore, be impatient and in our weakness think that non-violence is a sign of soft brains. It is not.

*Young India*, 2-7-'25, p. 232

## 147

### MUSIC IN LIFE

(The following translation of a speech by Gandhiji at the Second Annual Function of the National Music Association, Ahmedabad, will be read with interest. — M. D.)

There is a famous classical saying which has now become a proverb, that the man 'that hath no music in himself' is either an ascetic or a beast. We are far from being ascetics, and to the extent that we are devoid of music, we are near allied to beasts. To know music is to transfer it to life. The prevalent discord of today is an indication of our sad plight. There can be no Swaraj where there is no harmony, music.

Where there is discord and everyone striking his own tune, there is bad government or anarchy. Work for Swaraj fails to appeal to us because we have no music in us. When we have millions of people singing together in harmony or taking God's name in unison, making one music, we shall



have taken the first step to Swaraj. If we cannot achieve this simple thing, how can we win Swaraj?

We have free music classes in Ahmedabad for the last three years conducted by one who is an expert. And yet we have to be satisfied today with a roll attendance of 10 and a regular attendance of four. It is poor consolation indeed; but we live in hope and Dr. Hariprasad who sees a ray of hope when he finds even one *pol* out of the hundreds in Ahmedabad clean and tidy, might well feel satisfied that we have at least four regular music lovers.

Where there is filth and squalor and misery there can be no music. It implies an atmosphere quite the contrary. If we put a broad interpretation on music, i.e., if we mean by it union, concord, mutual help, it may be said that in no department of life can we dispense with it.

Music today has been degraded to mean the vocal effort of a singing girl. We fight shy of sending our sisters and daughters to music schools. There seems to be a superstition that their voice is best when it is devoid of sweetness. That explains why Dr. Hariprasad has had to express satisfaction with an attendance of ten students.

Music, truly speaking, is an ancient and sacred art. The hymns of Samaveda are a mine of music, and no *ayat* of the Koran can be recited unmusically. David's Psalms transport you to raptures and remind you of the hymns from Samaveda. Let us revive this art and patronize the school of music.

We see Hindu and Musalman musicians sitting cheek by jowl and partaking in musical concerts. When shall we see the same fraternal union in other affairs of our life? We shall then have the name of Rama and Rahman simultaneously on our lips.

I am glad some of you here are patronizing music. If many more send their children to the music class it will be part of their contribution to national uplift.

But to go a step further. If we would see music in millions of our poor homes, we should all wear Khadi and spin. The music we have had today was sweet indeed but it is a privilege of the favoured few. The music of the spinning

wheel can be a free gift to all and is therefore sweeter. It is the hope and solace and mainstay of the millions, and for me therefore the truly good music.

*Young India*, 15-4-'26, p. 140

## 148

## INFLUENCE OF MUSIC

(Translated from *Navajivan* by Pyarelal)

A student of the Gujarat Vidyapith asks:

“What has been the influence of music on your life?”

Music has given me peace. I can remember occasions when music instantly tranquillized my mind when I was greatly agitated over something. Music has helped me to overcome anger. I can recall occasions when a hymn sank deep into me though the same thing expressed in prose had failed to touch me. I also found that the meaning of hymns discordantly sung has failed to come home to me and that it burns itself on my mind when they have been properly sung. When I hear Gita verses melodiously recited I never grow weary of hearing and the more I hear the deeper sinks the meaning into my heart. Melodious recitations of the Ramayana which I heard in my childhood left on me an impression which years have not obliterated or weakened. I distinctly remember how when once the hymn “The path of the Lord is meant for the brave, not the coward” was sung to me in an extraordinarily sweet tune, it moved me as it had never before. In 1907 while in the Transvaal I was almost fatally assaulted, the pain of the wounds was relieved when at my instance Olive Doke gently sang to me “Lead Kindly Light”.

Let no one infer from this that I know music. On the contrary it would be more correct to say my knowledge of music is very elementary. I cannot critically judge music. All I can claim is that I have a natural ear for good homely music.

I do not mean to suggest either that because the influence of music has been uniformly good on me it must act similarly on others. On the contrary I know that



many people employ music to feed their carnal passions. To sum up, therefore, we may say that the influence of music will differ according to temperaments.

As Tulasidas has sung:

“The Lord of Creation created everything in this world as an admixture of good and evil. But a good man selects the good and rejects the evil even as the fabled swan is said to help himself to cream leaving the water in the milk.”\*

*Young India*, 10-1-'29, p. 15

## MY OBJECT IN SETTLING DOWN IN A VILLAGE

“I am here to serve no one else but myself,” said Gandhiji, “to find my own self-realization through the service of these village-folk. Man’s ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. And this cannot be done except through one’s country. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.”

“But some comforts may be necessary even for man’s spiritual advancement. One could not advance himself by identifying himself with the discomfort and squalor of the villager?”

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\* जड़-चेतन गुण-दोषमय विश्व कीन्ह करतार ।

संत-हंस गुण गहहिं पय, परिहरि वारि-विकार ॥

रामचरितमानस, बालकाण्ड, ६

“A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare. The satisfaction of one’s physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one’s narrow self, must meet at a certain point a dead stop, because it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. A man must arrange his physical and cultural circumstances so that they do not hinder him in his service of humanity, on which all his energies should be concentrated.”

*Harijan*, 29-8-'36, p. 226

## 150

## CINEMA AND MYSELF

(From “A Tissue of Misrepresentations” in “Notes”)

I have never once been to a cinema and refuse to be enthused about it and waste God-given time in spite of pressure sometimes used by kind friends. They tell me it has an educational value. It is possible that it has. But its corrupting influence obtrudes itself upon me every day. Education, therefore, I seek elsewhere.

*Young India*, 25-11-'26, p. 412 at p. 413

## 151

## WHY I AM PARTIAL TO PARSIS

(From “Late Parsi Rustomjee” in “Notes”)

A cable received from Durban from his son gives me the sad news of the death of Rustomjee Jiwanjee Ghorkhoo. For me it is a personal loss. He was a valued client, dear friend and faithful co-worker. He was as true a Parsi as he was a true Indian. He was an equally true man. He was an orthodox Parsi, but his Zoroastrianism was as broad as humanity itself. He befriended all without distinction. He could act pleasingly towards officials, but he could be unbending when the occasion demanded it. His word was as good as his bond. He was brave as a lion. He was chary



of making promises, but if he made them, he strove his best to keep them. After he declared himself a Satyagrahi, he never swerved, even during the darkest hours of the movement, not even when the end seemed never to be coming. When he took the pledge, he was by no means a young man. Nor was he untrammelled by business preoccupations. But he never counted the cost. He suffered losses without a murmur. He gave almost beyond his means and yet never unthinkingly. His charities were most catholic. He gave donations for mosques, madrasas, national schools. Many a young man owes his rise to Parsi Rustomjee, as he was called throughout South Africa. Personally I owe much to him. I have many friends in South Africa. But I have not known a warmer one. He harboured me when I was lynched. His house was a place of refuge for me and mine. People wonder why I am partial to Parsis. I am not partial, but I am thankful that I can bear testimony to their admirable virtues. So long as the memory of Parsi Rustomjee persists with me, so long will that portion of humanity claim my respectful admiration. If we had many Rustomjees in our public life, we should not be long in reaching our cherished goal. May his soul rest in peace, and may God give wisdom and strength to his two sons to follow in the footsteps of their father.

*Young India*, 20-11-'24, p. 379

## PARTIAL TO MUSALMANS !

(From "Notes")

The charge against me of partiality to Musalmans is being renewed with redoubled vigour. My critics say in effect, "You exaggerate the Hindu blemishes and underrate the Musalman's." I gladly subscribe to the charge in a way. If we are to give a correct judgment we should follow the excellent natural rule of seeing things in their proper perspective. Habit has made us reverse the natural process. We belittle our own faults and exaggerate the opponent's. That develops the attitude of intolerance.

If we would be charitable and tolerant, we would endeavour to see our opponents as they see themselves. We shall never completely succeed in the endeavour but it will give us the true perspective. What therefore appear to be my exaggerations of Hindu blemishes are only seemingly so. "But," says a critic, "you do not want us to believe that Maulana Abdul Bari is such a simple child of God as you make him out to be. We in the U. P. find him to be vain, untruthful and unreliable." I can only assure them that if I had found the Maulana Bari Saheb as they said he is, I would not have hesitated to say so. I have said the utmost I know against him when I say that he is a dangerous friend. I have not found him to be untruthful. The critics must not think as some of them do that I am flattering the Musalmans for gaining a political end. Such a thing is impossible for me, because I know that unity cannot be achieved by flattering. Courteousness must not be mistaken for flattery nor impudence for fearlessness.

*Young India*, 12-6-'24, p. 198

## 153

## TRUE APPRECIATION

(From "A Remarkable Address")

In the majority of cases, addresses presented to me contain adjectives which I am ill able to carry. Their use can do good neither to the writers nor to me. They unnecessarily humiliate me, for I have to confess that I do not deserve them. When they are deserved, their use is superfluous. It cannot add to the strength of the qualities possessed by me. They may, if I am not on my guard, easily turn my head. The good that a man does is more often than not, better left unsaid. Imitation is the sincerest flattery. I commend it, therefore, to the attention of all admirers. If it is my spinning they like, let them admire it by doing it themselves; if it is my regularity they appreciate, let them flatter me by being regular themselves. And if it is my truthfulness and non-violence they treasure, let them show the appreciation by their conduct.

*Young India*, 21-5-'25, p. 176



## TO MY ADMIRERS AND FRIENDS

(From "Notes")

The scene in Serajganj Conference attaching 'Mahatma' to my name has caused deep pain to me. Those who out of their infatuation for the application of the title 'Mahatma' to me either howled down the gentleman who would not use the name or who implored him to do so, rendered no service to the cause or to me. They harmed the cause of non-violence and pained me. What relish could they have in a person using a title from compulsion? I congratulate the gentleman upon his courage in having withdrawn from the Conference rather than use a title under compulsion. He showed, in my opinion, a truer appreciation of what I stand for than my blind admirers. I assure all my admirers and friends that they will please me better if they will forget the Mahatma and remember Gandhiji as the gentleman in question quite courteously did or think of me simply as Gandhi. The highest honour that my friends can do me is to enforce in their own lives the programme that I stand for or to resist me to their utmost if they do not believe in it. Blind adoration, in the age of action, is perfectly valueless, is often embarrassing and equally often painful.

*Young India*, 12-6-'24, p. 197

## NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

Whilst I was listening to praises of me at the Excelsior Theatre in Bombay on Sunday last, I felt that Mr. Bharucha had staged a play for the benefit of the distressed people in the South. But an incident changed it into a serious business for me. Mr. Bharucha had endeavoured to bring on the platform people belonging to different political parties. He had therefore put up Mr. Jamnadas Dwarkadas as one of the speakers. Mr. Jamnadas spoke of me as Gandhiji instead of 'Mahatma'. Two or three in the audience who could not brook the insult of my being

called 'Gandhiji' required the speaker to call me 'Mahatma'. Mr. Jamnadas bravely but courteously persisted in calling me Gandhiji, though he said he loved me no less than any in the audience. He protested that his manner of addressing me was more pleasing to me. The interruption however continued almost to the end. It was nevertheless more creditable to the meeting that the cry against Mr. Jamnadas was not taken up by the audience. Mr. Jamnadas was able to finish his speech without difficulty. All the same the interruption jarred on me. I saw that those admirers of me dishonoured and misinterpreted their idol whereas Mr. Jamnadas honoured and interpreted me properly by courteously but firmly reiterating his dissent from some of my political views and by refusing to call me 'Mahatma' at the dictation of any person. I therefore asked the friends who had been so discourteous to publicly apologize. I drew their attention to the fact that the rules of public meetings demanded a respectful behaviour even towards opponents. The code of courtesy was still more exacting for non-violent non-co-operators. The non-violence of non-co-operators obliged them to respect their opponents even as they respected their friends. Moreover the audience must respect the sentiments of those in whose honour they might meet. The interruptors should have known that I had often said that the name 'Mahatma' stank in my nostrils. It did for instance at the time of the Bombay riots of 1921. The use of the adjective was prohibited at the Ashram. Mr. Jamnadas had therefore done what was after my heart. After saying this I paused for the apology. The audience helped me by murmuring approval and advice to the interruptors to apologize. And the latter bravely stood up and apologized with folded hands. It was a sight that I cannot easily forget. In resuming my speech and in thanking the interruptors for their apology, I could not help remarking that the seed of Swaraj lay more in such true and gentlemanly conduct than in any number of eloquent speeches or debates and votes in the councils. The penitent members of the audience had brought Swaraj nearer by their frank and fearless repentance.

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The most benign spirit of Satyagraha was a spirit of perfect self-surrender in which resistance if any was on matters of obvious principle which one might have practised and woven into one's life. I told the audience that the whole science of Satyagraha if it might be so-called was evolved out of prolonged experience in the domestic field. In its terrible aspect I had to practise it in connection with my own wife, son and brother long deceased. It had cost me their estrangement. But it was all out of deepest love. I believe myself to be capable of boundless love as well towards other creatures of God as towards my own dearest relatives. Sometimes love's anguish left deep scars on the loved ones but it left much deeper ones on the lover's bosom. I owed no ill will to Englishmen. I had in some of them my best friends but there came a time when I had to say, "You shall not exploit my country. The exploitation has done incalculable harm. Some of you are indifferent to its welfare and would squeeze it as much as you can. Some others among you believe in your ignorance that the English rule in India is for her own good and that you are her trustees. This thing must end and that soon." For me to say this was to put my whole soul into doing it. The attempt had resulted in bringing into prominence the terrible aspect of Satyagraha. It had not ended the system of exploitation but it had resulted in dividing us. I must therefore put my whole energy in exposing to view the benignant aspect of Satyagraha. That could only be exhibited not by insistence but surrender. If I did not succeed I knew that it would not be due to the weakness in the science but the weakness of the scientist who did not enforce in his own person the doctrines he knew to be true. I knew that I was not a Mahatma, I did know that I was an *Alpatma*. Love knew no bounds and conquered all without exception. It melted the stoniest heart. It knew no self. Who knows that unconsciously even to myself, there was no anger or ill will lurking in me. But I must not flinch. I must try to conquer self and in the process heal the breaches I saw in our midst. "Pray," I concluded, "that I may have the strength to do so."

## MY AMBITION

A persistent correspondent from Simla asks me whether I intend to found a sect or claim divinity. I have answered him by a private letter. But he would have me make a public declaration for the sake of posterity. I should have thought that I had in the strongest terms repudiated all claim to divinity. I claim to be a humble servant of India and humanity and would like to die in the discharge of such service. I have no desire to found a sect. I am really too ambitious to be satisfied with a sect for a following for I represent no new truths. I endeavour to follow and represent truth as I know it. I do claim to throw a new light on many an old truth. I hope that this declaration will satisfy my inquirer and others like him.

*Young India*, 25-8-'21, p. 265 at p. 267

## CLEAVE NOT TO MY NAME BUT TO PRINCIPLES

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D. — part of the opening address by Gandhiji at the Second Annual Session of Gandhi Seva Sangh held at Hudli in Belgaum Dist.)

Then there is another and a graver risk. There is the danger of your Sangh deteriorating into a sect. Whenever there is any difficulty you will turn to my writings in *Young India* and *Harijan* and swear by them. As a matter of fact my writings should be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said and written. I have often said recently that even if all our scriptures were to perish, one *mantra* of Ishopanishad was enough to declare the essence of Hinduism, but even that one verse will be of no avail if there is no one to live it. Even so what I have said and written is useful only to the extent that it has helped you to assimilate the great principles of Truth and Ahimsa. If you have not assimilated them, my writings



will be of no use to you. I say this to you as a Satyagrahi meaning every word of it.

I want you to face the problems that will come before you this week, in the spirit of what I have said. My faith in truth and non-violence is ever growing, and as I am ever trying to follow them in my life I too am growing every moment. I see new implications about them. I see them in a newer light every day and read in them a newer meaning. That is why I am constantly placing new proposals before the Spinners' Association, the Harijan Sevak Sangh and the Village Industries Association. That does not mean that I am unsettled or unbalanced; that means that those are living organizations and must ever grow even as a tree is ever growing. I want you also to grow with me. I should not care to know what happens after I am gone, but I do wish that your organization may never be a stagnant pool but an ever-growing tree. Forget me therefore; my name is an unnecessary adjunct to the name of the Sangh; cleave not to my name but cleave to the principles, measure every one of your activities by that standard and face fearlessly every problem that arises.

*Harijan*, 1-5-'37, p. 92 at p. 93

## DON'T TURN GANDHISM INTO SECTARIANISM

(From report by M. D. of proceedings of the annual Gandhi Seva Sangh Conference held in Malikanda in E. Bengal, which appeared under the caption "Gandhi Seva Sangh")

Let Gandhism be destroyed if it stands for error. Truth and Ahimsa will never be destroyed, but if Gandhism is another name for sectarianism, it deserves to be destroyed. If I were to know, after my death, that what I stood for had degenerated into sectarianism, I should be deeply pained. We have to work away silently. Let no one say that he is a follower of Gandhi. It is enough that I should be my own follower. I know what an inadequate follower I am

of myself, for I cannot live up to the convictions I stand for. You are no followers but fellow-students, fellow-pilgrims, fellow-seekers, fellow-workers.

*Harijan*, 2-3-'40, p. 17 at p. 23

## NO ROOM FOR GANDHISM

(From "Question Box")

*Q.*: You say that no such thing as Gandhism exists, and that what you stand for is nothing new. I am a Muslim. I see flashes of Islamic glory in Gandhism. As a student of theology I see the grandeur of Hinduism and the vigour of Christianity, amply expounded in Gandhism. It includes also to a considerable extent the chaste philosophy of the entire East. I search the pages of India's past history, but your creed I do not find. Why, therefore, is it not new, and why may it not be termed Gandhism for those of us who believe in you and therefore it?

*A.*: I have a horror of 'isms', especially when they are attached to proper names. Even if all that you say of me is true, it does not make a new sect. My effort is to avoid not only new sects but even to do away with old and superfluous ones. Ahimsa abhors sects. Ahimsa is a unifying force. It discovers unity in diversity. All that you say is derivable from Ahimsa. To bring into being a new cult is repugnant to Ahimsa, to the very experiment I am making. Thus you will, I hope, see that there is no room for Gandhism.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'40, p. 41



## PROPAGATION OF GANDHISM

(The Gandhi Seva Sangh held its first annual meeting at Savli when the question of propagation of Gandhiji's teachings was discussed. Gandhiji's views on this question appeared in "Weekly Letter" by M. D. which are reproduced below.)

There was a talk amongst the members about the necessity for some kind of organized propaganda in order to help the spread of Gandhiji's teachings. All kinds of proposals were discussed and a committee formed to determine the nature of this propaganda. Gandhiji's own opinion in the matter came to be known as a result of a member having questioned the necessity for such propaganda: "There is no such thing as 'Gandhism', and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine, I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. There is, therefore, no question of my leaving any code like the Code of Manu. There can be no comparison between that great Law-giver and me. The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments, in both on as vast a scale as I could do. In doing so, I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence. By instinct I have been truthful, but not non-violent. As a Jain *muni* once rightly said I was not so much a votary of Ahimsa as I was of truth, and I put the latter in the first place and the former in the second. For as he put it I was capable of sacrificing non-violence for the sake of truth. In fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence. Our scriptures have declared that there is no Dharma (law) higher than Truth. But non-violence they

say is the highest duty. The word Dharma in my opinion has different connotations as used in the two aphorisms.

“ Well, all my philosophy, if it may be called by that pretentious name, is contained in what I have said. You will not call it ‘Gandhism’: there is no *ism* about it. And no elaborate literature or propaganda is needed about it. The scriptures have been quoted against my position, but I have held faster than ever to the position that truth may not be sacrificed for anything whatsoever. Those who believe in the simple truths I have laid down can propagate them only by living them. People have laughed at my spinning wheel, and an acute critic once observed that the spinning wheel would be so discredited that when I died the wheels would serve to make the funeral pyre. That, however, has not shaken my faith in the spinning wheel. How am I to convince the world by means of books that the whole of my constructive programme is rooted in non-violence? My life alone can demonstrate it.

“ But you may say that books and newspapers are needed in order to help workers to answer critics. Well I write as much as is needed in order to explain the things I stand for. And even if you fail to answer critics, why worry? Tell the poor villagers that you are there in their midst to serve them with your wheels, your brooms, and buckets; let them accept your service if they will, or reject it if they must because you cannot answer your critics.

“ Must we then, you will ask work away in silence, without bothering about critics? Yes; I should not mind your even taking a vow of silence. Write, if you feel that you cannot do without it. But let not your work suffer or the people’s enthusiasm be damped because you fail to publish books.

“ This, however, is the ideal. I can understand your desire for some authoritative publications explaining the similar things we are striving to do. These you may have without entering into a controversy. The proposed committee should function without any flourish of trumpets. Your publications should be in the shape of guide books for workers.”



## MY STATUE

## I

(Originally appeared in "Notes")

Correspondence has been pouring in upon me protesting against the Mahatma's statue said to be in course of construction on the Congress ground at a cost of Rs. 25,000/-. I know nothing of this statue. I have enquired about it. But I must not wait for confirmation. Assuming that such a statue is in course of construction, I reinforce the protest of my correspondents and I agree with them that it will be waste of good money to spend Rs. 25,000 on erecting a clay or metallic statue of the figure of a man who is himself made of clay and is more fragile than a bangle which can keep by preservation for a thousand years, whereas the human body disintegrates daily and undergoes final disintegration after the usual span of life. I have learnt from my Muslim friends, among whom I have passed the best part of my life, my dislike of statues and photographs of my figure. And I should like the Reception Committee, if the report is true, to desist from the unfortunate enterprise. Let them save what money they can. If it is a mere rumour, let these lines serve as a warning to those who want to honour me by erecting statues and having portraits of my figure, that I heartily dislike these exhibitions. I shall deem it ample honour if those who believe in me will be good enough to promote the activities I stand for and at least divert the money they would use for statues and portraits to the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, A. I. S. A., A. I. V. I. A., or Hindustani Talimi Sangh.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'39, p. 1

## II

(From "Notes")

There is a talk in Bombay of spending ten lacs of rupees on erecting my statue on a public site. I have received several letters criticizing, some even fiercely, the proposal

as if I were guilty of making any such extravagant proposal! It is perhaps human nature to make a mountain out of a molehill. Only the wise sift the grain from the chaff. In the present case, there seems to be a foundation for the criticism. I must say that I have a dislike even for being photographed; nevertheless, photographs have been taken of me. I have let artists make models more than once. Notwithstanding this inconsistency, I must dissent emphatically from any proposal to spend any money on preparing a statue of me, more especially at a time when people do not have enough food and clothing. In Bombay the beautiful, insanitation reigns. There is so much overcrowding that poor people are packed like sardines. Wise use of ten lacs of rupees will consist in its being spent on some public utility. That would be the best statue. Money thus wisely spent will make an adequate return. Imagine how many hungry mouths would be filled if the amount was spent on growing more food crops!

*Harijan*, 21-9-'47, p. 329

## 162

### “A TEMPLE TO GANDHIJI”

Under this strange heading I read a newspaper cutting sent by a correspondent to the effect that a temple has been erected where my image is being worshipped. This I consider to be a gross form of idolatry. The person who erected the temple has wasted his resources by misusing them, the villagers who are drawn there are misled and I am being insulted in that the whole of my life has been caricatured in that temple. The meaning that I have given to worship is distorted. Worship of the Charkha lies in plying it for a living or as a sacrifice for ushering in Swaraj. Gita is worshipped not by parrot-like recitation but by following its teaching. Recitation is good and proper only as an aid to action according to its teaching. A man is worshipped only to the extent that he is followed, not in his weaknesses but in his strength. Hinduism is degraded when it is brought down to the level of the worship of the



image of a living being. No man can be said to be good before his death. After death too he is good for the person who believes him to have possessed certain qualities attributed to him. As a matter of fact, God alone knows a man's heart. Hence the safest thing is not to worship any person, living or dead, but to worship perfection which resides only in God known as Truth. The question then certainly arises as to whether possession of photographs is not a form of worship carrying no merit with it. I have said as much before now in my writings. Nevertheless I have tolerated the practice as it has become an innocent though a costly fashion. But this toleration will become ludicrous and harmful if I were to give directly or indirectly the slightest encouragement to the practice above described. It would be a welcome relief if the owner of the temple removed the image and converted the building into a spinning centre where the poor will card and spin for wages and the others for sacrifice and all will be wearers of Khaddar. This will be the teaching of the Gita in action and true worship of it and me.

*Harijan*, 24-3-'46, p. 52

### 163

#### DEIFICATION OF ME

(Originally appeared in the "Notes" under the above title)

A Muslim friend met me at Dungargadh station and told me that the process of deifying me especially among the Gonds was going on as merrily as ever. I have expressed my horror and strongest disapproval of this type of idolatry more than once. I claim to be a mere mortal, heir to all the weaknesses that human flesh betrays. It would be infinitely better that the Gonds should be taught to understand the meaning of my simple message than that they should indulge in a meaningless deification of me which can do no good either to them or to me and can intensify the superstitious nature of such simple people as the Gonds. I bespeak the help of every Congressman in the necessary work of undeceiving the Gonds of their error.

*Young India*, 7-5-'25, p. 162

## QUESTIONABLE IDOLATRY

(Originally appeared in columns of "Notes" under the title "Save Me from My Friends")

A correspondent writes from far off Cape Comorin:

"I just want to place before you some of the funny things taking place in these places without your least knowing of it or even thinking of it. In the car festivals here the Image is placed in the car and taken in procession. One set of people want that your photo should be placed side by side with the Image and taken in procession. Another set of riper men say that you would not like to be treated as God. The two parties have proposed to arrange themselves in battle array for the Cape Comorin car festival to come off after another ten days. I beg you will send the parties a word of advice."

Another from Mathura sends me a horrible portrait representing me as lying stretched on the coil of the thousand-mouthed serpent with the roll of non-co-operation in one hand and the spinning wheel suspended on the other arm. My poor wife is massaging my legs. The other celebrities have also been pressed into service. I must not violate the reader's feelings by describing the other features. Suffice it to say that the picture is a caricature of the Vaishnavite legend representing Vishnu resting on the coil of Sheshanag. The correspondent who sends the picture asks me to plead with the publishers for its withdrawal. He rightly adds that though they may not publicly express their resentment, the picture must hurt the feelings of orthodox Vaishnavas. I whole-heartedly endorse the sentiments of both these correspondents. The motive in each case may be quite good. But this excessive hero-worship borders on questionable idolatry, and is calculated to wound the susceptibilities of the orthodox people without there being any excuse for giving such offence. Such excesses will defeat the purpose of the blind worshippers. If they have any regard for my feelings, let the organizers of the car festival who would put my portrait in the car



and the publishers of the offending picture desist from their activity. There are many other healthy ways of giving expression to and promoting patriotic sentiment.

*Young India*, 4-6-'31, p. 130

165

## GANDHI WORSHIP

(Originally appeared under the title "Superstitious Practice" in the columns of "Notes")

The following extract from a letter recently received by me will cause pain to the reader as it has to me.

"I am here in the very heart of the jungle villages where 90 p.c. of the Gonds are living. While touring I happened to come to a village named Silagota in Dangargarh Tehsil of the Khairagarh estate of Chhattisgarh Division in the Central Provinces. On Sunday last there was a great gathering from the surrounding villages. Many of them had come from a distance perhaps of more than 15 miles. I enquired into the cause of the gathering and came to know that for the past two years they had been enjoying every Sunday as a Gandhi day. On that day they do not work at all. Some men or women in the congregation are supposed to be visited by your spirit and are said to be inspired. They tell fortunes and promise children to barren women. I know this news will pain you. Can you not send one of your workers to stop this practice? If this practice of worshipping you is not stopped now, I think the day is not far off when they will actually place an idol of you in a Mandir and commence worshipping you."

There is already enough superstition in our country. No effort should be spared to resist further addition in the shape of Gandhi worship. Personally I have a horror of all adoration. I believe in adoring virtue apart from the wearer. And that can be done only after the wearer's death. Form is nothing. It is perishable. Virtue persists and incarnates in one person or another. The poor Gonds know nothing of me or my mission. I know I have no power to give any person anything. The very idea of my spirit visiting and possessing any person is repugnant to me. The practice

can only do harm and lead to fraud. I urge co-workers to put down the worship the correspondent describes. It is a sin to let simple folk such as the Gonds to be encouraged in the practice of superstition.

*Young India*, 20-11-'24, p. 379

## 166

## BLASPHEMY

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the above title)

A correspondent writes:

"I regret very much to inform you, that one constantly sees pictures in which you and other leaders have been represented as Shrikrishna and Pandavas, respectively. Will you not use your influence to stop this, as it must hurt the religious feelings of many like myself who consider Shrikrishna to have been not merely a great man but God incarnate?"

The correspondent has my fullest sympathy. I have not seen the pictures, but I hold it to be a blasphemy to represent me as Shrikrishna. I claim to be a humble worker and no more among many in a great cause, which can only be injured rather than advanced by glorification of its leaders. A cause has the best chance of success, when it is examined and followed on its own merits. Measures must always in a progressive society be held superior to men, who are after all imperfect instruments working for their fulfilment. I would therefore urge, with all the strength at my command, enthusiasts or enterprising businessmen to observe some sense of proportion and withdraw all such pictures, which like the one under notice are undoubtedly calculated to wound deep religious susceptibilities.

*Young India*, 13-7-'21, p. 217 at p. 224



## TWO REQUESTS

A friend suggests that I should resume writing my *Autobiography* from the point where I left off and further, that I should write a treatise on the science of Ahimsa.

I never really wrote an *Autobiography*. What I did write was a series of articles narrating my experiments with truth which were later published in book form. More than twenty years have elapsed since then. What I have done or pondered during this interval has not been recorded in chronological order. I would love to do so but have I the leisure? I have resumed the publication of *Harijan* in the present trying times as a matter of duty. It is with difficulty that I can cope with this work. How can I find time to bring the remainder of my experiments with truth up to date? But if it is God's will that I should write them, he will surely make my way clear.

To write a treatise on the science of Ahimsa is beyond my powers. I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain. What I understand according to my lights, to be my duty and what comes my way I do. All my action is actuated by the spirit of service. Let any one who can systematize Ahimsa into a science do so—if indeed it lends itself to such treatment. In the event of my inability the correspondent has suggested three names in order of preference for this task: Shri Vinoba, Shri Kishorlal Mashruwala, Shri Kaka Kalelkar. The first named could do so but I know he will not. Every hour of his is scheduled for his work and he would regard it as sacrilege to take a single moment therefrom for writing a Shastra. I would agree with him. The world does not hunger for Shastras. What it craves and will always crave is sincere action. He who can appease this hunger will not occupy his time in elaborating a Shastra.

Shri Kishorlal has already written an independent treatise. If his health permits I know he would like to write further. It may not be correct to call his work

a Shastra but it may be said to be very near to one. In his present state of health, however, I do not think he can shoulder the burden and I would be the last person to lay it on him. Like Shri Vinoba he too does not allow a moment of his time to be wasted. Much of it is given to help solve the personal problems of a large circle of friends. The end of the day leaves him utterly exhausted.

Shri Kakasaheb like Shri Thakkar is an incorrigible nomad. Just now he has made the propagation and development of the national and provincial languages his special concern. Even if he wanted to divert a moment of his time to the writing of a Shastra I would try to prevent him from doing so.

From the above it may be concluded that there is no need at present for the treatise in question. Any such during my life-time would necessarily be incomplete. If at all, it could only be written after my death. And even so let me give the warning that it would fail to give a complete exposition of Ahimsa. No man has ever been able to describe God fully. The same holds true of Ahimsa. I can give no guarantee that I will do or believe tomorrow what I do or hold to be true today. God alone is omniscient. Man in the flesh is essentially imperfect. He may be described as being made in the image of God but he is far from being God. God is invisible, beyond the reach of the human eye. All that we can do, therefore, is to try to understand the words and actions of those whom we regard as men of God. Let them soak into our being and let us endeavour to translate them into action but only so far as they appeal to the heart. Could any scientific treatise do more for us?

*Harijan*, 3-3-'46, p. 28



## IN SEARCH OF GURU

(From "Notes")

As a result of my statement in Chapter I, Part II, of *My Experiments with Truth* that I was still in search of a Guru, numerous correspondents, Hindus, Musalmans and Christians, have favoured me with long letters telling me how to find a Guru. More letters are still coming in. Some tell me actually where to go and whom to see. Some refer me to certain literature. I am grateful to all these correspondents for their solicitude for my welfare. But let them and others realize that my difficulty is fundamental. Nor does it trouble me. It is fundamental because my conception of a Guru is perhaps not of the ordinary. Nothing but perfection will satisfy me. I am in search of one who, though in the flesh, is incorruptible and unmoved by passion, free from the pairs of opposites, who is Truth and Ahimsa incarnate and who will therefore fear none and be feared by none. Everyone gets the Guru he deserves and strives for. The difficulty of finding the Guru I want is thus obvious. But it does not worry me; for it follows from what I have said, that I must try to perfect myself before I meet the Guru in the flesh. Till then I must contemplate him in the spirit. My success lies in my continuous, humble, truthful striving. I *know* the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip. God's word is: "He who strives never perishes". I have implicit faith in that promise. Though therefore from my weakness I fail a thousand times, I will not lose faith but hope that I shall see the Light when the flesh has been brought under perfect subjection as some day it must. I wonder if the kind correspondents will now understand my position and cease to worry about me but join me in the search, unless they are satisfied that they have found Him.

*Young India*, 17-6-'26, p. 215

## THE TRUE GURU

(Originally appeared in "Notes")

In confirmation of my note on the definition of Guru, a correspondent sends the following interesting information:

"In connection with your definition of a Guru, I am reminded of the beautiful lines of the poet-saint Ramdas. He has said:

विवेका ऐसा गुरु । चित्ता ऐसा शिष्य चतुर ।

जीवा ऐसा मित्र उदार । भुवनत्रयीं मिलेना ॥

"'You cannot find a better Guru than *viveka* or the power of discriminating truth from untruth, right from wrong or good from evil. There is no better disciple than *chitta* or mind, and no nobler friend than one's *jeeva* or soul.' In fact Ramdas points out that man need not go outside himself in search of a Guru. 'Be guided by your power of discrimination, derived from your implicit faith in God, keep your mind under control of such a power and nobly sacrifice the self.' This in essence is the advice of the Maharashtrian saint."

*Young India*, 24-6-'26, p. 230

## A GREAT SEER

Kavi Rajachandra was born in a place called Vavania in Kathiawad. I came in touch with him in 1891, the day of my return from London, at Dr. P. J. Mehta's residence in Bombay. Kavi, as I used to call him, was nearly related to Dr. Mehta. He was introduced to me as a *shatavadhani*, i.e., one who can remember a hundred things at a time. Kavi was quite young at the time, not much older than I was then, i.e., 21 years. He had however given up all public exhibition of his powers and was given to purely religious pursuits. I was much struck by his simplicity and independence of judgment. He was free from all touch of blind orthodoxy. What struck me perhaps more was



his combining business with religion in practice. A student of the philosophy of religion, he tried to practise what he believed. Himself a Jain, his toleration of the other creeds was remarkable. He had a chance of going to England for studies, but he would not go. He would not learn English. His schooling was quite elementary. But he was a genius. He knew Sanskrit, Magadhi and, I believe, Pali. He was a voracious reader of religious literature and acquired through Gujarati sources a knowledge, enough for his purpose, of Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Such was the man who captivated my heart in religious matters as no other man has till now. I have said elsewhere that in moulding my inner life Tolstoy and Ruskin vied with Kavi. But Kavi's influence was undoubtedly deeper if only because I had come in closest personal touch with him. His judgment appealed to my moral sense in the vast majority of cases. The bedrock of his faith was unquestionably Ahimsa. His Ahimsa was not of the crude type we witness today among its so-called votaries who confine their attention merely to the saving of aged cattle and insect life. His Ahimsa, if it included the tiniest insect, also covered the whole of humanity.

Yet I never could regard Kavi as a perfect man. But of all the men I knew he appeared to me to be nearer perfection than the rest. Alas, he died all too young (thirty-three years) when he felt that he was surely going to see Truth face to face! He has left many worshippers but not as many followers. His writings, largely consisting of soulful letters to inquirers, have been collected and published. An attempt is being made to have them translated in Hindi. I know that they would bear an English translation. They are largely based on inward experience.

Napa,  
18-3-1930

*Modern Review*, June 1930

## TOLSTOY

(The following is a condensed translation by Pyarelal of Gandhiji's message on Tolstoy delivered to the Youth League of Ahmedabad in the Satyagraha Ashram on the Tolstoy Centenary Day. It appeared originally under the title "Tolstoy and the Youth".)

Personally I do not believe in the *shraddha* ceremony as commonly understood among us in India, and although I remember having performed *shraddha* at a time, I have given up the practice long since, for, as I wrote to a correspondent recently in reply to a question of his, I believe that the only true way of celebrating the *shraddha* of one's ancestors is constantly to ponder over and translate into daily life their good qualities. I might have neglected the observance of this great *shraddha* but for the insistence of Dr. Hariprasad, your President, that I should speak to you on this occasion. He told you just now that like Dattatreya, I had many *gurus* of whom Tolstoy was one. I wish I could claim the honour.

I have called Gokhale my political *guru*. But in spiritual matters, I am sorry to say, I have not yet found any one to whom I could completely surrender myself and whose opinion I could implicitly and unquestioningly accept as I could Gokhale's in politics. Perhaps I am not yet ripe for a spiritual *guru* because I believe that the spiritual *guru* comes to you of himself, in fact seeks you out when you are ready for him.

But while, thus the little throne within has remained vacant, next to the late Rajachandra, Tolstoy is one of the three moderns who have exerted the deepest spiritual influence on my life, the third being Ruskin. It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of scepticism and doubt that I came across his book *The Kingdom of God is within You*, and was very deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my scepticism and made me a firm believer



in Ahimsa. What has appealed to me most in Tolstoy's life is that he practised what he preached and reckoned no cost too great in his pursuit of truth. Take the simplicity of his life, it was wonderful. Born and brought up in the midst of the luxury and comfort of a rich aristocratic family, blessed in an abundant measure with all the stores of the earth that desire can covet, this man who had fully known all the joys and pleasures of life turned his back upon them in the prime of his youth and afterwards never once looked back.

He was the most truthful man of his age. His life was a constant endeavour, an unbroken tide of striving to seek the truth, and to practise it as he found it. He never tried to hide truth or tone it down but set it before the world in its entirety without equivocation or compromise, undeterred by the fear of any earthly power.

He was the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced. No one in the West, before him or since, has written and spoken on non-violence so fully or insistently and with such penetration and insight as he. I would even go further and say that his remarkable development of this doctrine puts to shame the present day narrow and lopsided interpretation put upon it by the votaries of Ahimsa in this land of ours. In spite of India's proud claim of being the *Karmabhumi*, the Land of Realization, and in spite of some of the greatest discoveries in the field of Ahimsa, that our ancient sages have made, what often goes by the name of Ahimsa among us today is a travesty of it. True Ahimsa should mean a complete freedom from ill will and anger and hate and an overflowing love for all. For inculcating this true and higher type of Ahimsa amongst us, Tolstoy's life with its ocean-like love should serve as a beacon-light and a never-failing source of inspiration. Tolstoy's critics have sometimes said that his life was a colossal failure, that he never found his ideal, the mystical green stick, in whose quest his entire life was passed. I do not hold with these critics. True, he himself said so. But that only shows his greatness. It may be that he failed fully to realize his ideal in life, but that is only human. No one can attain perfection while

he is in the body, for the simple reason that the ideal state is impossible so long as one has not completely overcome his ego, and ego cannot be wholly got rid of so long as one is tied down by shackles of the flesh. It was a favourite saying of Tolstoy that the moment one believes that he has reached his ideal his further progress stops and his retrogression begins and that the very virtue of an ideal consists in that it recedes from us the nearer we go. To say therefore that Tolstoy on his own admission failed to reach his ideal does not detract a jot from his greatness, it only shows his humility.

Much has been often sought to be made of the so-called inconsistencies of Tolstoy's life; but they were more apparent than real. Constant development is the law of life, and a man who always tries to maintain his dogmas in order to *appear* consistent drives himself into a false position. That is why Emerson said that foolish consistency was the hobgoblin of little minds. Tolstoy's so-called inconsistencies were a sign of his development and his passionate regard for truth. He often *seemed* inconsistent because he was continuously outgrowing his own doctrines. His failures were public, his struggles and triumphs private. The world saw only the former, the latter remained unseen probably by Tolstoy himself most of all. His critics tried to make capital out of his faults but no critic could be more exacting than he was with regard to himself. Ever on the alert for his shortcomings, before his critics had time to point at them he had already proclaimed them to the world magnified a thousand-fold and imposed upon himself the penance that seemed to him necessary. He welcomed criticism even when it was exaggerated and like all truly great men dreaded world's praise. He was great even in his failures and his failures give us a measure not of the futility of his ideals, but of his success.

The third great point was the doctrine of 'bread labour', (Tolstoy adopted the phrase from the Russian peasant Bondaref and insisted that it should be interpreted literally) viz., that every one was bound to labour with his body for bread; and that most of the grinding misery in the world was due to the fact that men failed to discharge



their duty in this respect. He therefore regarded all schemes to ameliorate the poverty of the masses by the philanthropy of the rich while they themselves shirked body labour and continued to live in luxury and ease as hypocrisy and a sham, and suggested that if only man got off the backs of the poor, much of the so-called philanthropy would be rendered unnecessary.

And with him to believe was to act. So in the afternoon of his life, this man who had passed all his days in the soft lap of luxury took to a life of toil and hard labour. He took to boot-making and farming at which he worked hard for full eight hours a day. But his body labour did not blunt his powerful intellect, on the contrary, it rendered it all the more keen and resplendent and it was in this period of his life that his most vigorous book *What Is Art?* which he considered to be his masterpiece was written in the intervals saved from the practice of his self-chosen vocation.

The choice before our youth today lies between the way of self-restraint and the way of indulgence and ease, the one leading to salvation and freedom, the other to utter destruction. They are at the parting of the ways.... The present is for them an age of transition of ideals and of ordeals and the one thing needful for the world, its youth and particularly the youth of India in this crisis is Tolstoy's progressive self-restraint, for it alone can lead to true freedom for themselves, the country and the world. ...The test for the youth lies before them and that is to win their diploma from the university of life, with its snares and pitfalls and ordeals, without which their academic degrees will be in vain. The three essential qualities of Tolstoy's life mentioned by me are of the utmost use to the youth in this hour of the world's trial.

The Youth League has very rightly set before itself the ideal of service of the country. But that service is not possible unless it is rooted in love or Ahimsa. Ahimsa is not mere non-killing. A person who remains smugly satisfied with the non-killing of noxious life but has no love in his

heart for all that lives will be counted as least in the Kingdom of Heaven. True love is boundless like the ocean and rising and swelling within one spreads itself out and crossing all boundaries and frontiers envelops the whole world. This service is again impossible without bread labour, otherwise described in the Gita as *yajna*. It is only when a man or woman has done body labour for the sake of service that he or she has the right to live. The Gita says that anybody who eats without performing *yajna*, in Tolstoy's language bread labour, is a thief, 'eats sin'. But body labour becomes *yajna* only when it is undertaken in a spirit of service, not of indulgence as it may easily become when it is done only to develop the animal in man. A man who adopts service as his ideal will go on curbing his carnal appetites more and more and though, as in the case of Tolstoy, the attainment of full self-restraint seems always as far away as ever he will never cease to persevere in it and regard such perseverance as the *summum bonum* of life. Firhad in his quest of Shirin wore away his life in breaking rocks, shall we do less for our Shirin of Truth, without which service is not?

*Young India*, 20-9-'28, p. 319

## 172

### RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

(Foreword by Gandhiji to the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*)

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna is a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age



of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa. His love knew no limits geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

## SECTION FOUR : POLITICS AND RELIGION

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### POLITICS AND RELIGION

(From "The Question Box")

*Q.*: In your *Autobiography* you have said that you cannot think of politics apart from religion. Do you still hold that view? If so, how is it that in a country of many diverse religions like India you expect a common political policy to be adopted?

*A.*: Yes, I still hold the view that I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion. Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.

*Harijan*, 10-2-'40, p. 445

174

### POLITICS WITHOUT RELIGION

(An extract from "May God Help")

For me there is no politics without religion—not the religion of the superstitious and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal Religion of Toleration. Politics without morality is a thing to be avoided. "Then," says the critic, "I must retire from all public activity." Such however is not my experience. I must try to live in society and yet remain untouched by its pitfalls.

*Young India*, 27-11-'24, p. 390



## POLITICS—A GAME OF WORLDLY PEOPLE?

(Originally appeared under the title "L. Tilak's Letter")

To,

The Editor, *Young India*,

Ahmedabad

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to see that in your article\* on "Reform Resolution" in the last issue, you have represented me as holding that I considered 'every thing fair in politics'. I write this to you to say that my view is not correctly represented herein. Politics is a game of worldly people and not of *sadhus*, and instead of the maxim अक्रोधेन जिने क्रोधं as preached by Buddha, I prefer to rely on the maxim of Shri Krishna ये यथा मां प्रपद्यंते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम्। That explains the whole difference and also the meaning of my phrase 'responsive co-operation'. Both methods are equally honest and righteous but the one is more suited to this world than the other. Any further explanation about the difference will be found in my *Gita-rahasya*.

Poona City,

18-1-1920

*Yours etc.,*

B. G. Tilak

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\*The following extract is taken from the article "The Reforms Resolution in the Congress" published in *Young India*, January 14, 1920, p. 4 at p. 5.

"L. Tilak represents a definite school of thought of which he makes no secret. He considers that everything is fair in politics. We have joined issue with him in that conception of political life. We consider that political life of the country will become thoroughly corrupt if we import western tactics and methods. We believe that nothing but the strictest adherence to honesty, fairplay and charity can advance the true interests of the country. But we refuse, because of the essential difference just pointed out, to believe that in accepting the amendment L. Tilak was guided by any motive other than that of meeting his opponents' views so far as it was possible."

I naturally feel the greatest diffidence about joining issue with the Lokamanya in matters involving questions of interpretations of religious works. But there are things in or about which instinct transcends even interpretation. For me there is no conflict between the two texts quoted by the Lokamanya. The Buddhist text lays down an eternal principle. The text from the Bhagavadgita shows to me how the principle of conquering hate by love, untruth by truth, can and must be applied. If it be true that God metes out the same measure to us that we mete out to others, it follows that if we would escape condign punishment we may not return anger for anger but gentleness even against anger. And this is the law not for the unworldly but essentially for the worldly. With deference to the Lokamanya I venture to say that it betrays mental laziness to think that the world is not for *sadhus*. The epitome of all religions is to promote *purushartha*, and *purushartha* is nothing but a desperate attempt to become *sadhu*, i.e. to become a gentleman in every sense of the term.

Finally, when I wrote the sentence about everything being fair in politics, according to the Lokamanya's creed, I had in mind his oft-repeated quotation शठं प्रति शाठ्यम्. To me it enunciates bad law. And I shall not despair of the Lokamanya with all his acumen agreeably surprising India one day with a philosophical dissertation proving the falsity of the doctrine. In any case I pit the experience of a third of a century against the doctrine underlying शठं प्रति शाठ्यम्. The true law is शठं प्रत्यपि सत्यम्.

*Young India*, 28-1-'20, p. 3



## RELIGION—THE BASIS OF ALL LIFE STRUCTURE

(From "Notes")

A wag asks three questions. . . . One requiring an answer runs: "Is not political education infinitely superior to the religious?" In my opinion, political education is nothing worth, if it is not backed by a sound grounding in religion by which is not meant sectional or sectarian belief. Man without religion is man without roots. Therefore, religion is the basis on which all life structure has to be erected, if life is to be real.

*Harijan*, 21-7-'46, p. 229

## POLITICS IN TERMS OF MORAL PROGRESS

## I

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

An American journalist asked Gandhiji:

"Is it possible that your activities may some day be removed from the political field?"

"Perhaps you do not know," replied Gandhiji, "that I felt compelled to come into the political field because I found that I could not do even social work without touching politics. I feel that political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress. In democracy, no part of life is untouched by politics. Under the British you cannot escape politics in the good sense. It embraces the whole life. All who breathe must pay a tax. That is British rule in India. Take the Salt Tax for instance. It concerns everybody. The collector of revenue and the policeman are the only symbols by which millions in India's villages know British rule. One cannot sit still while the people are being ravaged."

"Then your job will never be finished," remarked the friend.

“It will be finished only with my death. I must be watchful, whether it is the foreign government that is in power or indigenious, if I am a social reformer in the true sense of the term. This is applicable to all.”

*Harijan*, 6-10-'46, p. 341

## II

(From “Notes”)

A question was put to Gandhiji whether he would leave politics after the 15th of August 1947 when India would be free.

The reply of Gandhiji was as follows:

In the first instance, there is no freedom approaching the Kingdom of God. We seem to be as far from it as ever. And in any case, the life of the millions is my politics from which I dare not free myself without denying my life-work and God. That my politics may take a different turn is quite possible. But that will be determined by circumstances.

*Harijan*, 17-8-'47, p. 281

## 178

### SPIRITUALIZING THE POLITICAL LIFE

(The following extracts are taken from a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Bangalore on unveiling a portrait of Mr. Gokhale in May, 1915.)

My dear countrymen, — Before I perform this ceremony to which you have called me, I wish to say this to you that you have given me a great opportunity or rather a privilege on this great occasion. . . . I have declared myself a disciple in the political field of one whose portrait you have asked me to unveil this morning and I have him as my *Rajaguru*. It was in 1896 that I made this declaration, and I do not regret having made the choice.

Mr. Gokhale taught me that the dream of every Indian who claims to love his country, should be not to glorify in language but to spiritualize the political life of the country and the political institutions of the country. He inspired



my life and is still inspiring; and in that I wish to purify myself and spiritualize myself. I have dedicated myself to that ideal. I may fail, and to what extent I may fail, I call myself to that extent an unworthy disciple of my master.

What is the meaning of spiritualizing the political life of the country? What is the meaning of spiritualizing myself? That question has come before me often and often and to you it may seem one thing, to me it may seem another thing; it may mean different things to the different members of the Servants of India Society itself. It shows much difficulty and it shows the difficulties, of all those who want to love their country, who want to serve their country and who want to honour their country. I think the political life must be an echo of private life and that there cannot be any divorce between the two.

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I was by the side of that saintly politician to the end of his life and I found no ego in him. I ask you, members of the Social Service League, if there is no ego in you. If he wanted to shine, if he wanted to shine in the political field of his country, he did so not in order that he might gain public applause, but in order that his country may gain. He developed every particular faculty in him, not in order to win the praise of the world for himself, but in order that his country might gain. He did not seek public applause, but it was showered upon him, it was thrust upon him; he wanted that his country might gain and that was his great inspiration.

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You ask me to unveil this portrait today, and I will do so in all sincerity.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (G. A. Natesan & Co. 4th Edn.), p. 1009

## MY POLITICS

(One of the questions and answer thereto from an article entitled "A Student's Questions" are reproduced below.)

*Q.*: What are you doing in India just now? Have you given up political leadership and politics?

*A.*: At the present moment I am enjoying what may be called well-earned rest, and at the same time trying to develop the working of the All-India Spinners' Association which is at present the only all-India activity that engages my attention. My political leadership technically ended with the closing of the year for which I was President of the Congress, but in reality it ended with my incarceration. But I have not given up politics in my sense of the term. I never was a politician in any other sense. My politics concern themselves with internal growth but being of a universal nature they react upon the external in a most effective manner.

*Young India*, 25-2-'26, p. 77

## ALL FOR THEE

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the above title)

A kind Tamil friend sends me for my day of silence quotations that do one's soul good to read. I do not give in *Young India* quotations except when there is an association about them and they are relevant. In the collection the friend has sent me I find the following very appropriate verses from George Herbert:

"Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see,  
And what I do in anything,  
To do it as for Thee:  
A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine;  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and the action fine."



I give one more equally appropriate. It is from Ruskin:

“When we build, let it be such a work as our descendants will thank us for; and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon them, See! this our fathers did for us.”

Public life would be much purer than it is if we would do everything in the name of the King of kings and not for self but for posterity.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26, p. 394

## 181

### POWER POLITICS AND AHIMSA

(From “Question Box” — translated from the original in Gujarati)

*Q.*: Wherever in the world today one casts one's eye, there is nothing but violence and power politics to be seen. And this obtains even in democratic countries like England and America. Have you pondered as to what your Ahimsa can do under such circumstances?

*A.*: It is true that power politics exist everywhere; but you are very much mistaken if you imagine that true democracy obtains either in America or England. The voice of the people may be said to be God's voice, the voice of the Panchayat. But how can there be the voice of God where the people themselves are the exploiters as England and America are? They live on the coloured races by exploiting them. If the voice of the people is the voice of God, they will be above party. His scales will be ever evenly weighted with truth and non-violence. This statement embraces my reply. My Ahimsa is neither maimed nor weak. It is all-powerful. Where there is Ahimsa, there is Truth and Truth is God. How he manifests Himself I cannot say. All I know is that He is all-pervading and where He is, all is well. There is, therefore, one law for all. Wherever in the world Truth and non-violence reign supreme, there is peace and bliss. That these exist nowhere

shows that they are hidden from man for the time being. But they cannot disappear for ever. That faith must sustain the faithful.

*Harijan*, 29-9-'46, p. 332

## 182

## INDIAN STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND NON-VIOLENCE

(From "Gandhiji and Future Role of Constructive Programme" by Pyarelal)

My eyes have now been opened. I now see that what we practised during the fight with the British under the name of non-violence, was not really non-violence. God had purposely sealed my eyes as He wanted to accomplish His great purpose through me. That purpose being accomplished, He has restored to me my sight.

*Harijan*, 6-3-'49, p. 5 at p. 7

## 183

## OUTSIDE HIS FIELD

(From "Notes")

Major-General Cariappa is reported to have said as follows :

"Non-violence is of no use under the present circumstances in India and only a strong army can make India one of the greatest nations in the world."

I fear, like many experts, General Cariappa has gone beyond his depth and has been unwittingly betrayed into a serious misconception of Ahimsa, of whose working in the nature of things, he can only have very superficial knowledge. By reason of life-long practice of Ahimsa, I claim to be an expert in it, though very imperfect. Speaking in absolute terms, the more I practise it the clearer I see how far I am from the full expression of Ahimsa in my life. It is his ignorance of this, the greatest duty of man in



the world, which makes him say that in this age non-violence has little scope in the face of violence, whereas I make bold to say that in this age of the Atom Bomb unadulterated non-violence is the only force that can confound all the tricks put together of violence. It would have become the General, unaided as he can only now be, by his British teachers of military science and practice, not to have gone out of his depth. Generals greater than General Cariappa have been wise and humble enough frankly to make the admission that they can have no right to speak of the possibilities of the force of Ahimsa. We are witnessing the tragic insolvency of military science and practice in its own home. Should a bankrupt, who has been by the gamble in the share market, sing the praise of that particular form of gambling?

*Harijan*, 16-11-'47, p. 412

# 184

## TO PROGRESS WE MUST MAKE NEW HISTORY

(Originally appeared under the title "From Far-off America")

Some time ago I answered some questions put by a correspondent in America. He now returns to the charge and puts several further questions, the first being:

"What good is that brave and fearless mentality when it cannot save the things you love? You may not be afraid to die, but what is it that will keep a band of robbers from taking away from you what you cherish if you are going to remain non-violent to the end. If the victims of a robber do not offer violent resistance it is so much easier for the robber to loot them. Robbery has been going on and it will go on in the world till the victims are easy. The strong will rob the weak, resistance or no resistance. To be weak is a sin. Not to prepare by all means to get rid of this weakness is a crime."

The writer forgets that retaliation does not always succeed. The robber is likely, if stronger, to defeat the protector and vent his wrath, kindled by the resistance

received, on the unfortunate victim whose plight would therefore be the worse for the resistance offered on her behalf. It is true that the protector will have the satisfaction of having done his best for his charge. But the same satisfaction will be available to the non-violent protector. For, he too will die in the attempt to rescue the victim. What is more, he will have the additional satisfaction of having tried to soften the heart of the robber by his pleading. The writer's difficulty arises from the fact of his having assumed that the non-violent protector is to be a mere passive helpless spectator of the robbery. As a matter of fact, however, in my scheme, love is presumed to be a more active and potent force than brute force. He who has not the love and remains passive is a coward. He is neither man nor brute. He has proved himself unfit to protect.

The writer obviously cannot realize, as I have done, the tremendous power that non-violent resistance has over one's adversary. Non-violent resistance is the resistance of one will against another. That resistance is possible only when it is freed from reliance on brute force. Reliance on brute force as a rule presupposes surrender when that force is exhausted. Does the writer know that a woman with determined will can successfully resist her ravisher however powerful he may be?

I admit that the strong will rob the weak and that it is sin to be weak. But this is said of the soul in man, not of the body. If it be said of the body, we could never be free from the sin of weakness. But the strength of soul can defy a whole world in arms against it. This strength is open to the weakest in body. A weak-willed Zulu, though strong as a giant in body, surrenders to a little white child. Who has not seen strong-bodied bullies surrendering helplessly to their frail mothers? Love conquers the brute in the son. The law that subsists between mother and son is universal in its application. Nor need love be reciprocal. It is its own reward. Many a mother has tamed by her love her erring defiant children. Let us all prepare to get rid of the weakness of love. There is chance of success there. The rivalry in loving is conducive to health. The world has been trying all these ages to become strong in the wielding of



brute force and it has miserably failed. Rivalry in generating brute force is race suicide.

The writer adds:

"The British rulers seem to have as much soul-force as you have, but they have military force and practical knowledge of human nature besides. The result is obvious."

Military force is inconsistent with soul-force. Frightfulness, exploitation of the weak, immoral gains, insatiable pursuit after enjoyments of the flesh are utterly inconsistent with soul-force. The soul-force that the British rulers have is therefore subservient to the brute force if it is not asleep altogether.

The writer then puts the eternal conundrum:

"There are certain greedy persons in the world and they are doing mischief. They have power in their hands. They may be mad, but they are doing harm nevertheless. It will not do for us to stand by with folded hands and let them go on with their devilish work. We must take the power away from them even at the cost of non-violence, so that they may not any more harm."

History teaches one that those who have, no doubt, with honest motives, ousted the greedy by using brute force against them, have in their own turn become a prey to the disease of the conquered. If it be better to be slaves than slave-drivers, if this is no mere copy-book maxim, we can easily afford to let the slave-drivers do their worst, whilst being weary of the brutal tug of war, so unbefitting our human nature, we try to explore the possibilities of matching the brute force of the greedy exploiters and the like with soul-force.

But the writer is met with this difficulty at the threshold of the experiment:

"Mahatmaji, you admit that the people of India have not followed your creed. You do not seem to realize the cause of it. The truth is that the average person is not a Mahatma. History proves this fact beyond doubt. There have been a few Mahatmas in India and elsewhere. These are exceptions. And the exceptions only prove the rule. You must not base your actions on the exceptions."

It is curious how we delude ourselves. We fancy that one can make the perishable body impregnable and

we think it impossible to evoke the hidden powers of the soul. Well, I am engaged in trying to show, if I have any of these powers, that I am as frail a mortal as any of us and that I never had anything extraordinary about me nor have any now. I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow-mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough in me to confess my errors and to retrace my steps. I own that I have an immovable faith in God and His goodness and unconsumable passion for truth and love. But is that not what every person has latent in him? If we are to make progress, we must not repeat history but make new history. We must add to the inheritance left by our ancestors. If we may make new discoveries and inventions in the phenomenal world, must we declare our bankruptcy in the spiritual domain? Is it impossible to multiply the exceptions so as to make them the rule? Must man always be brute first and man after, if at all?

*Young India*, 6-5-'26, p. 164

## 185

### PRIESTHOOD AND POLITICS

(The summary of Gandhiji's speech at Shwe Dagon in Rangoon before a meeting of Burmese *foongis* and the laity which appeared in the article "With Gandhiji in Burma" by M. D. is given below.)

I have already casually referred to the meeting with the Burmese *foongis* and the laity. A large number of the Burmese who formed part of the seething mass of humanity under the shadow of the Shwe Dagon were the *foongis* who, said the President of the meeting, were taking a leading part in politics. It was not possible for Gandhiji to make himself heard either in Hindi or English, but a brief message was addressed to the *foongis* and it was translated by the President sentence by sentence:

"To see on this elevated and sacred site so many *foongis* and such a vast audience is no doubt an inspiring sight, and if I had enough energy left in me at the end of the day, under that inspiration I might have delivered a



pretty long speech. But this I would say to the *foongi* friends that in common with the rest of the priesthood of the world you are being weighed in the balance. I was glad to find you telling me that the *foongis* were leading the political movement in Burma, but you have a very serious responsibility upon your shoulders when you undertake to lead the political battle. History shows that the priesthood has not always interfered with political matters to the benefit of mankind. Very often unworthy ambition has moved the priesthood of the world as it has moved unscrupulous men to take part in politics, and if now you *foongis* aspire to lead the political movement of this, one of the fairest lands on the face of the earth, you are shouldering a tremendous responsibility. I would ask you not only to be pure beyond suspicion, but I would ask you to combine with stainless purity, great wisdom and great ability. This very essential condition being granted you will find that the whole of Burma will be at your beck and call and will respond to your lead. May the spirit of the great Lord Buddha under whose shadow we are now seated guide every one connected with the movement."

*Young India*, 28-3-'29, p. 97 at p. 99

## RELIGION-DOMINATED POLITICS

(Appeared originally under the title "Unseemly if True")

Asaf Ali Saheb, President of the Delhi P.C.C. writes:

"The enclosed complaint was first brought up before the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee. The writer has now secured two supporters. I know the writer personally as a truthful and unbiased nationalist and I believe his word.

"I had heard of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and its activities; and I also knew that it was a communal organization. The slogan and the speech complained of have been brought to my notice for the first time. I can think of no means of counteracting the effect of such slogans and speeches on other communities, except inviting your attention to them. Perhaps you will take notice of it in the *Harijan*."

The complainant's letter is in Urdu. Its purport is that the organization referred to in Asaf Ali Saheb's letter consisting of 3,000 members goes through a daily lathi drill which is followed by reciting the slogan, 'Hindustan belongs to Hindus and to nobody else.' This recital is followed by a brief discourse in which speakers say: 'Drive out the English first and then we shall subjugate the Muslims. If they do not listen, we shall kill them.' Taking the evidence at its face value, the slogan is wrong and the central theme of the discourse is worse. I can only hope that the slogan is unauthorized and the speaker who is reported to have uttered the sentiments ascribed to him was no responsible person. The slogan is wrong and absurd, for Hindustan belongs to all those who are born and bred here and who have no other country to look to. Therefore, it belongs to Parsis, Beni Israels, to Indian Christians, Muslims and other non-Hindus as much as to Hindus. Free India will be no Hindu Raj, it will be Indian Raj based not on the majority of any religious sect or community but on the representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion. I can conceive a mixed majority putting the Hindus in a minority. They would be elected for their record of service and merits. Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics. It is in the unnatural condition of foreign domination that we have unnatural divisions according to religion. Foreign domination going, we shall laugh at our folly in having clung to false ideals and slogans.

The discourse referred to is surely vulgar. There is no question of 'driving out' the English. They cannot be driven out except by violence superior to theirs. The idea of killing the Muslims if they do not remain in subjection may have been all right in bygone days; it has no meaning today. There is no force in the cry of driving out the English if the substitute is to be Hindu or any other domination. That will be no Swaraj. Self-government necessarily means government by the free and intelligent will of the people. I add the word 'intelligent' because, I hope that India will be predominantly non-violent. Members of society based on non-violence must all be so educated as to be



able to think and act for themselves. If their thought and action be one, it will be because they are directed both to a common goal and common result even as the thought and action of a hundred men pulling a rope in one direction would be.

I hope that those in charge of the Swayam Sevak Sangh will inquire into the complaint and take the necessary steps.

*Harijan*, 9-8-'42, p. 261

187

‘RENDER UNTO CAESAR’

An unknown English friend has thought it worthwhile cabling to me that in launching upon civil disobedience I am going against the teaching of Jesus: ‘Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.’ Another, an Indian Christian, writes from the Punjab somewhat in the same fashion and forsaking charity, pours abuse upon my devoted head for my action. He says further that whereas he considered me to be good man formerly, he is now utterly undeceived. I can reassure this friend that civil disobedience is no new thing with me. I began to preach and practise it in 1906. His regard for me therefore was evidently from ignorance, if his present dislike of me is wise. But I have learnt from the New Testament, as also from other sources, that, if one wishes to walk in the fear of God, one should be indifferent about popular praise or blame.

Now for the question. As I hold my conduct to be in utter agreement with universal religion and as I hold the New Testament teaching in great esteem, I should not like it to be justly said of me that I was going against the teaching of Jesus. ‘Render unto Caesar’ was quoted against me before too. I have not read into the celebrated verse the meaning that my critics have sought to put into it. Jesus evaded the direct question put to him because it was a trap. He was in no way bound to answer it. He therefore

asked to see the coin for taxes. And then said with withering scorn, 'How can you who traffic in Caesar's coins and thus receive what to you are benefits of Caesar's rule refuse to pay taxes?' Jesus's whole preaching and practice point unmistakably to non-co-operation, which necessarily includes non-payment of taxes. Jesus never recognized man's authority as against God's. He who disregarded the whole host of priesthood, which was in those days superior to kingship, would not have hesitated to defy the might of emperors had he found it necessary. And did he not treat with supreme disdain the whole of the farcical trial through which he was made to pass?

Lastly let me warn honest friends against running into the trap of literalism. The 'letter' surely 'killeth' it is the 'spirit' that 'giveth life'. In the present case I find no difficulty in reading into the text a satisfactory meaning. But it would matter little to me that some text should confound me, if there was no mistaking the spirit of the whole teaching of a book respected as among the world's religious scriptures.

*Young India*, 27-3-'30, p. 105

## 188

### THE FUNCTION OF RELIGION VIS-A-VIS THE STATE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Another group of friends presented Gandhiji with a poser, 'Could he guarantee that under independence the right of proselytization would be guaranteed by a statute?' This provoked the counter question, 'Did they really believe in the ideal of independence or was their support to the independence ideal only for a consideration?' In the latter case, he would say, remarked Gandhiji, that they believed neither in independence nor in religion. Who could suppress the voice of truth, if it filled one's being? And of what avail was a statutory guarantee if there was not the fire within to bear witness to truth?



“It is true, no one can suppress the voice of truth,” interpolated one of them. “We want a guarantee from you that no attempt would be made to suppress it.”

“I cannot give you that guarantee because I have no authority,” replied Gandhiji. It was the function of religion, he continued, to save the temporal power from losing its soul; religion did not depend upon it for protection. And he cited to them the illustration of Daniel, the servant of God, who used to pray behind closed doors. But when Darius the King issued a decree prohibiting the worship of any God or man save himself under a penalty, he began to pray to God publicly, the windows of his chamber being open so that all could see him praying. He was thrown into the hungry lion’s den but came out unscathed. The result was that the King rescinded his former decree which was ‘unalterable’ under the laws of Medes and Persians and made another decree to the effect that in every dominion of his kingdom, “men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God and steadfast as ever.” And “so Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus.” That was the only true way of proselytization and it needed no guarantee statutory or otherwise. It was its own seal and sanction. “To take a leaf from the history of our own times, remember the words of the late Lord Salisbury who, when in office, had told a missionary deputation about China that they were a poor specimen, if for their mission they sought the protection of British guns,” concluded Gandhiji.

*Harijan*, 28-4-'46, p. 101 at p. 102

## WHY I OPPOSE A THEOCRATIC STATE

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

Freedom without equality for all irrespective of race or religion, was not worth having for the Congress. In other words, the Congress and any government representative of the Congress must remain a purely democratic, popular body leaving every individual to follow that form of religion which best appealed to him without any interference from the State. There was so much in common between man and man that it was a marvel that there could be any quarrel on the ground of religion. Any creed or dogma which coerced others into following one uniform practice was a religion only in name, for a religion worth the name did not admit of any coercion. Anything that was done under coercion had only a short lease of life. It was bound to die. It must be a matter of pride to them whether they were four anna Congress members or not that they had in their midst an institution without a rival which disdained to become a theocratic State and which always believed and lived up to the belief that the State of their conception must be a secular, democratic State having perfect harmony between the different units composing the State.

*Harijan*, 23-11-'47, p. 421 at p. 423

## AUTHORITY BLURS VISION

(From "Rulers and Ruled" by M. D.)

Authority blurs the vision. We cannot have Rama in every age, nor Umar. None of the Caliphs who came after the glorious thirty years of the Caliphate could ever approach any one of the first four Caliphs. Such rulers are rare even as the gems embedded in the most hidden recesses of mines. Wherever, therefore, I find a ruler getting irritated or angry I am patient with him. For anger is natural to them as much as to you or me if we were similarly placed. Kings



are no more philosophers or saints than any one of us. The world only knows one Janaka Videhi. Even under Swaraj we shall have to put up with a fair amount of failings of the Swaraj officials.

*Young India*, 15-1-'25, p. 17 at p. 18

## 191

### STATE REGULATION OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS

#### I

I do not believe that the State can concern itself or cope with religious education. I believe that religious education must be the sole concern of religious associations. Do not mix up religion and ethics. I believe that fundamental ethics is common to all religions. Teaching of fundamental ethics is undoubtedly a function of the State. By religion I have not in mind fundamental ethics but what goes by the name of denominationalism. We have suffered enough from State-aided religion and a State Church. A society or a group, which depends partly or wholly on State aid for the existence of its religion, does not deserve or, better still, does not have any religion worth the name. I do not need to give any illustrations in support of this obvious truth as it is to me.

*Harijan*, 23-3-'46, p. 76

#### II

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

*Q.*: Should religious instruction form part of the school curriculum, as approved by the State? Do you favour separate schools for children belonging to different denominations for facility of religious instruction? Or, should religious instruction be left in the hands of private bodies? If so, do you think it is right for the State to subsidize such bodies?

*Gandhiji's answer*: As to this question he said that he did not believe in State religion even though the whole community had one religion. The State interference would

probably always be unwelcome. Religion was purely a personal matter. There was in reality as many religions as minds. Each mind had a different conception of God from that of the other.

He was also opposed to State aid partly or wholly to religious bodies. For he knew that an institution or group, which did not manage to finance its own religious teaching, was a stranger to true religion. This did not mean that the State schools would not give ethical teaching. The fundamental ethics were common to all religions.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47, p. 61 at p. 63

### III

I do not agree that the Government should provide religious education. If there are some people who want to give religious education of the wrong type, you cannot prevent it. If you try to do so, the result can only be bad. Those who want to give religious education may do so on their own, so long as it is not subversive of law and order or morals. The Government can only teach ethics based on the main principles common to all religions and agreed to by all parties. In fact, ours is a secular State.

*Harijan*, 9-11-'47, p. 401 at p. 402

### 192

#### NO COMPARISON POSSIBLE

A friend asked me the other day whether I shared the opinion often expressed that as between nationalism and religion, the former was superior to the latter. I said that the two were dissimilars and that there could be no comparison between dissimilars. Each was equal to the other in its own place. No man who values his religion as also his nationalism can barter away the one for the other. Both are equally dear to him. He renders unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's. And if Caesar, forgetting his limits, oversteps them, a man of God does not transfer his loyalty to another



Caesar, but knows how to deal with the usurpation. A rehearsal of this difficulty gave rise to Satyagraha.

Take a homely illustration. Suppose I have mother, wife and daughter. All the three must be equally dear to me in their own places. It is a vulgar error to think that a man is entitled to forsake his mother and his daughter for the sake of his wife. He dare not do the converse. And if any of the three oversteps her limits, the law of Satyagraha comes to his assistance for the restoration of the equilibrium of the three forces.

*Harijan*, 7-12-'47, p. 452

## 193

## RELIGION, A PERSONAL AFFAIR

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

"If I were a dictator, religion and State would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it," remarked Gandhiji sometime back in answer to a question by a missionary friend who asked whether in Free India there would be complete religious freedom and whether religion would be separate from the State. "The State would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern." He then went on to describe his conception of religion. "You must watch my life, how I live, eat, sit, talk, believe in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion," he said.

Asked which movement, e.g. women's, political, scientific or religious would have had the most far-reaching influence in the world of tomorrow and would be considered 50 years hence as having had the greatest impact on world affairs as a whole and for the greatest good of mankind, he said, it was wrong to bracket religious movement with the rest. "It is religious movement that would dominate the future," he added. "It would do so today but it does not, for religion has been reduced to a Saturday or a

Sunday affair; it has to be lived every moment of one's life. Such religion, when it comes, will dominate the world."

*Harijan*, 22-9-'46, p. 321

## 194

## THE REWARD OF PUBLIC LIFE

In reply to the citizens' address at Bangalore presented in May 1915, Mr. Gandhi made the following speech:

I did not want to be dragged in the carriage. There is a meaning in that. Let us not spoil our public men by dragging them. Let them work silently. We should not encourage the thought that one has to work, because one will be honoured similarly. Let public men feel that they will be stoned, they will be neglected and let them still love the country; for service is its own reward. A charge has been brought against us that we as a nation are too demonstrative and lack business-like methods. We plead guilty to the charge. Are we to copy modern activities or are we to copy the ancient civilization which has survived so many shocks? You and I have to act on the political platform from a spiritual side and if this is done, we should then conquer the conquerors. The day will dawn then, when we can consider an Englishman as a fellow-citizen (*cheers*). That day will shortly come; but it may be difficult to conceive when. I have had signal opportunities of associating myself with Englishmen of character, devotion, nobility, and influence. I can assure you that the present wave of activity is passing away and a new civilization is coming shortly which will be a nobler one. India is a great dependency and Mysore is a great native State. It must be possible for you to transmit this message to British Governors and to British statesmen; the message is: "Establish a Ramarajya in Mysore and have as your minister a Vasishtha who will command obedience." (*Prolonged cheers*). Then my fellow-countrymen, you can dictate terms to the conqueror (*Prolonged cheers*).

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Natesan & Co., 3rd Edn.), p. 241



## CHARACTER IN PUBLIC LIFE

(From "One Thing Needful")

There is in modern public life a tendency to ignore altogether the character of a public worker so long as he works efficiently as a unit in an administrative machinery. It is said that everybody's character is his own private concern. Though I have known this view to have been often taken I have never been able to appreciate, much less to adopt it. I have known the serious consequences overtaking organizations that have counted private character as a matter of no consequence. Nevertheless the reader will have observed that for my immediate purpose I have restricted the application of my proposition only to organizations like the Harijan Sevak Sangh which make themselves trustees for the welfare of dumb millions. I have no manner of doubt that possession of a spotless character is the indispensable requisite of such service. Workers in the Harijan cause or for Khadi or for village industries must come in closest touch with utterly unsophisticated, innocent, ignorant men and women who might be likened to children in intelligence. If they have not character, they must fail in the end and for ever damn the cause they espouse in the surroundings in which they are known. I write from experience of such cases. Happily they are rare enough for the numbers engaged in such services, but frequent enough to call for public warning and caution on the part of organizations and workers who are engaged in such services. These last cannot be too watchful or too exacting of themselves.

*Harijan*, 7-11-'36, p. 308

## HOW TO REFORM SOCIETY ?

(To a question of a highly educated Negro visitor from South Africa as to the nature of relation between the process of self-purification and the actual problems of the day and how to set such process in motion, Gandhiji gave a reply which is reproduced below. It is extracted from the article "Some Foreign Visitors" by Pyarelal.)

The first step is to turn the search-light inward, to proclaim your failings to yourself and the world. There is nothing so debasing and demoralizing as to conceal your weakness and to profess to have strength which you do not possess. The second thing would be to set about boldly and fearlessly to purify public life. Unfortunately a belief has today sprung up that one's private character has nothing to do with one's public activity. This superstition must go. Our public workers must set about the task of reforming society by reforming themselves first. This spiritual weapon of self-purification intangible as it seems is the most potent means for revolutionizing one's environment and for loosening external shackles. It works subtly and invisibly; it is an intensive process and though it might often seem a weary and long drawn-out process, it is the straightest way to liberation, the surest and the quickest, and no effort can be too great for it. What it requires is faith — an unshakable, mountain-like faith that flinches from nothing.

*Young India*, 28-3-'29, p. 103 at p. 104



## HOW TO DEAL WITH AN ADVERSARY?

(Originally published under the title "For 'Followers' ")

A friend sends me the following:

"It will be very helpful if you will kindly guide your followers about their conduct when they have to engage in a political controversy. Your guidance on the following points is particularly needed:

- (a) Vilification so as to lower the opponent in public estimation;
- (b) Kind of criticism of the opponent permissible;
- (c) Limit to which hostility should be carried;
- (d) Whether effort should be made to gain office and power."

I have said before in these pages that I claim no followers. It is enough for me to be my own follower. It is by itself a sufficiently taxing performance. But I know that many claim to be my followers. I must therefore answer the questions for their sakes. If they will follow what I endeavour to stand for rather than me they will see that the following answers are derived from truth and Ahimsa:

(a) Vilification of an opponent there can never be. But this does not exclude a truthful characterization of his acts. An opponent is not always a bad man because he opposes. He may be as honourable as we may claim to be and yet there may be vital differences between him and us.

(b) Our criticism will therefore be if we *believe* him to be guilty of untruth to meet it with truth, of discourtesy with courtesy, of bullying with calm courage, of violence with suffering, of arrogance with humility, of evil with good. 'My follower' would seek not to condemn but convert.

(c) There is no question of any limit to which hostility may be carried. For there should be no hostility to persons. Hostility there must be to acts when they are subversive of morals or the good of society.

(d) Office and power must be avoided. Either may be accepted when it is clearly for greater service.

*Young India*, 7-5-'31, p. 99

## SLAVES OF OUR OWN KARMA

(From "Swaraj or Death")

There is some truth in the correspondent's reasoning. But he is wholly wrong in imputing all evil to the Government. After all, is there not a great deal of truth in the saying that a people get the Government they deserve? If we had not been a people easily duped and as easily subdued, we would not have succumbed to the blandishments or the force of the East India Company and given up hand-spinning or Khaddar. If the Hindus and Musalmans had been living like brothers, the British satraps could not have divided us. And it is libellous to blame the Government for the existence of untouchability. Probably if the Government had no fear of a revolt of orthodoxy they would have made short work of untouchability long ago. I do not know a single case in which the Government have obstructed that reform. The correspondent is wrong in imputing blame to the British Government for the Vaikom business. It is solely due to the timidity of the indigenous Government. I am no lover of the existing system of Government. But I shall fail to destroy it, if in my rage I lose the faculty of discrimination. 'Give the devil his due' is a sound proverb worth bearing in mind.

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The correspondent's mistake lies in his misconception of the function of Government. He evidently thinks that an ideal Government is that which orders everything for us so that we need not even think for ourselves. Whereas, in truth a Government that is ideal governs the least. It is no self-government that leaves nothing for the people to do. That is pupillage—our present state. . . . If we impute all our weaknesses to the present Government, we shall never shed them.

*Young India*, 27-8-'25, p. 296



## CONGRESS POSITION

Indian National Congress which is the oldest national political organization and which has after many battles fought her non-violent way to freedom cannot be allowed to die. It can only die with the nation. A living organism ever grows or it dies. The Congress has won political freedom, but it has yet to win economic freedom, social and moral freedom. These freedoms are harder than the political, if only because they are constructive, less exciting and not spectacular. All-embracing constructive work evokes the energy of all the units of millions.

The Congress has got the preliminary and necessary part of her freedom. The hardest has yet to come. In its difficult ascent to democracy, it has inevitably created rotten boroughs leading to corruption and creation of institutions, popular and democratic only in name. How to get out of the weedy and unwieldy growth?

The Congress *must* do away with its special register of members, at no time exceeding one crore, not even then easily identifiable. It had an unknown register of millions who could never be wanted. Its register should now be co-extensive with all the men and women on the voters' rolls in the country. The Congress business should be to see that no faked name gets in and no legitimate name is left out. On its own register it will have a body of servants of the nation who would be workers doing the work allotted to them from time to time.

Unfortunately for the country they will be drawn chiefly for the time being from the city dwellers, most of whom would be required to work for and in the villages of India. The ranks must be filled in increasing numbers from villagers.

These servants will be expected to operate upon and serve the voters registered according to law, in their own surroundings. Many persons and parties will woo them. The very best will win. Thus and in no other way can

the Congress regain its fast ebbing unique position in the country. But yesterday the Congress was unwittingly the servant of the Nation, it was *Khudai Khidmatgar*—God's servant. Let it now proclaim to itself and the world that it is only God's servant—nothing more, nothing less. If it engages in the ungainly skirmish for power, it will find one morning that it is no more. Thank God, it is now no longer in sole possession of the field.

I have only opened to view the distant scene. If I have the time and health, I hope to discuss in these columns what the servants of the Nation can do to raise themselves in the estimation of their masters, the whole of the adult population, male and female.

*Harijan*, 1-2-'48, p. 4

## 200

### HIS LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

(The following is the draft constitution for the Congress which by the circumstances of Gandhiji's death has become his last will and testament to the nation. — Pyarelal)

Though split into two, India having attained political Independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, i.e. as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns. The struggle for the ascendancy of civil over military power is bound to take place in India's progress towards its democratic goal. It must be kept out of unhealthy competition with political parties and communal bodies. For these and other similar reasons, the A.I.C.C. resolves to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh under the following rules with power to alter them as occasion may demand.

Every Panchayat of five adult men or women being villagers or village-minded shall form a unit.



Two such contiguous Panchayats shall form a working party under a leader elected from among themselves.

When there are one hundred such Panchayats, the fifty first grade leaders shall elect from among themselves a second grade leader and so on, the first grade leaders meanwhile working under the second grade leader. Parallel groups of two hundred Panchayats shall continue to be formed till they cover the whole of India, each succeeding group of Panchayats electing second grade leader after the manner of the first. All second grade leaders shall serve jointly for the whole of India and severally for their respective areas. The second grade leaders may elect, whenever they deem necessary, from among themselves a chief who will, during pleasure, regulate and command all the groups.

(As the final formation of Provinces or districts is still in a state of flux, no attempt has been made to divide this group of servants into Provincial or District Councils and jurisdiction over the whole of India has been vested in the group or groups that may have been formed at any given time. It should be noted that this body of servants derive their authority or power from service ungrudgingly and wisely done to their master, the whole of India.)

1. Every worker shall be a habitual wearer of Khadi made from self-spun yarn or certified by the A.I.S.A. and must be a teetotaller. If a Hindu he must have abjured untouchability in any shape or form in his own person or in his family and must be a believer in the ideal of inter-communal unity, equal respect and regard for all religions and equality of opportunity and status for all irrespective of race, creed or sex.

2. He shall come in personal contact with every villager within his jurisdiction.

3. He shall enrol and train workers from amongst the villagers and keep a register of all these.

4. He shall keep a record of his work from day-to-day.

5. He shall organize the villages so as to make them self-contained and self-supporting through their agriculture and handicrafts.

6. He shall educate the village folk in sanitation and hygiene and take all measures for prevention of ill health and disease among them.

7. He shall organize the education of the village folk from birth to death along the lines of Nai Talim, in accordance with the policy laid down by the Hindustani Talimi Sangh.

8. He shall see that those whose names are missing on the statutory voters' roll are duly entered therein.

9. He shall encourage those who have not yet acquired the legal qualification, to acquire it for getting the right of franchise.

10. For the above purposes and for others to be added from time to time, he shall train and fit himself in accordance with the rules laid down by the Sangh for the due performance of duty.

The Sangh shall affiliate the following autonomous bodies:

1. All-India Spinners' Association;
2. All-India Village Industries Association;
3. Hindustani Talimi Sangh;
4. Harijan Sevak Sangh;
5. Go-seva Sangh.

### **Finance**

The Sangh shall raise finances for the fulfilment of its mission from among the villagers and others, special stress being laid on collection of poor man's pice.

New Delhi, 29-1-'48

M. K. Gandhi

*Harijan*, 15-2-'48, p. 32



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